

THE SUN DOCTOR

A Novel by
ROBERT SHAW

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The author would like to acknowledge that the physical condition of certain negroes in the tropics was first brought to his attention by Mr. Robert Graves' account of THE WHITTAKER NEGROES in *Encounter*.

The fragments of Bushmen poems quoted in the text are based on the translations of Arthur Markowitz, to whom the author's thanks are due.

PART ONE

◆ I ◆

AS he breathed he tasted salt.

An old passenger boat was labouring up the English Channel in the dark. The huge man lying on his bunk in the most comfortable cabin in the ship was the only passenger awake. He was a red-haired man in his late forties, deeply burned by the equatorial sun.

On the deck above him an icy rain started to fall. The man trembled as though the rain was falling on him. The wind changed quarter, blew from astern. The engines throbbed like drums. With every roll now he slid deeper into the still waterway of an African marsh. On hollowed logs he slid into the white and gold flowers, into the carpet of insects living and dead. The insect wings shivered in his ears. He covered his ears with his hands but could not shut out the reproach of the wings, nor the bitter cries of the marsh birds.

The throbbing engines, the sea waves, and the wind thrust him deeper into the white and gold flowers, the dead insects, the frogs and the water snakes. Out of sight. The hands twitched over the drowning head as if he were picking off fleas. Now he heard only the low unhappy chatter of human voices above the water. Negro voices. Negro voices receding through the swamp.

In the English Channel the wind bore up a flock of gulls. As they passed overhead one of these gulls hesitated, then wheeled around the ship crying for shelter. The man heard that cry. Once again he found himself on an African hillside in the darkness. Once again he knelt, picked up the

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dead negress in his arms, and stumbled down the track towards the hospital lights.

Some deaths a doctor remembers.

Doctor Halliday switched on the light, took a gulp of brandy from the flask on the little table beside the bunk, then lay back face down again. He seemed to be trying to bury himself in those white pillows. He was trying to recapture some of the favourite images of his childhood.

The pleasant images faded: he had called on them too often. He heard his father coming up the stairs to the attic and getting into his bed. "Are you awake, Benjamin?" His father always used his full name. Of course he was awake. "Leave the boy alone," his mother shouted. His father was crying, hugging him, burying *his* face in the pillows, turning his head away from his son because of his breath. His father was crying and repeating over and over again: "One day you'll understand, Benjamin, one day you'll understand." But he had never understood. There had not been time enough for him to understand his father. "Whatever you do for God's sake don't get like me. Promise me, Benjamin . . . promise you won't get like me."

Perhaps because of the rolling of the old ship his thoughts became erotic. Might I lose myself there, Doctor Halliday wondered? What else is left? Perhaps here in England there will be someone for me. Am I ready at last?

He wished he was not alone in the cabin. His mind abandoned itself with women. In his imagination he uttered strange cries, and heard them uttered. There was a moment when he actually did cry out.

He had become so tense his legs had cramped. He had

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to get up off the bunk, stand on them, light himself a cigarette. He stared out through the porthole at the black sea.

The wind dropped, the rolling grew less. Bells sounded. He glanced at his watch. He went back to the bunk and lay down again. He fell into a sweating sleep. In this hot sleep he began to dream of women again. In the end it was one woman: a pretty English girl whose face, if he could have realised it then, he had seen in the old copy of *The Tatler* that was lying on a table in the first-class passenger lounge. Presently he was smiling with her, holding her, almost succeeding. Almost! Each time something went wrong: each time he woke and shifted his position on the bed.

It was day. Doctor Halliday got up and dressed in the new Portuguese suit he bought when he had changed ships in Lisbon. The first thing he noticed was the stillness and the quiet. At last those engines had stopped. As usual he felt quite different in the daylight. He did not want to go out on the deck of the ship and look at Southampton. He felt he could not bear to look at anything properly this morning.

He had breakfast with the Captain. They talked about England. They shook hands. "Goodbye, Captain. Thank you."

"Goodbye, Doctor Halliday. It has been my pleasure."

"You know, mister," said the Captain as Halliday descended the gang-plank. "He's the loneliest man I've ever seen." "Yes," said the mate. "But I didn't like him. And he's knocking it back a bit isn't he?"

On the dock people said "Good morning" and nodded

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their heads respectfully. An official of the shipping company escorted him to the train; one of the third-class passengers asked him for his autograph. The train left Southampton. He was alone again. He turned on the heaters in the compartment to full strength. When he was warmer he looked out of the window at the countryside. For the first time that day he was able to look properly. He was astonished by what he saw: England had changed! Everything was smaller. Overhead a white roof of cloud stretched from sky-line to sky-line: the train he was in might have been a boy's, a toy train racing along the floor inside a tent. All the colours were so pale. In fact the countryside looked unreal: perhaps he was staring at a series of photographs being flashed before him so that if he were to stop the train to get out and walk into this little countryside, it would disappear. And perhaps there was someone to disappear with—pathetic, naïve, or not, he could not get this idea out of his head. The train was travelling fast. In the days at sea he had hoped that the English landscape would help to give him peace but now he was not even sure that he liked it. In any event, beauty was but an ancillary form of treatment for his complaint.

He took his brandy flask out of his overcoat pocket and began to drink. He began to feel less odd in his new clothes. The noises of the train ceased to irritate him. He grew less exhausted.

He drank.

The countryside became real. In it he began to notice another kind of change: tangible change, tangible details of change: compact little houses, bungalows, caravan sites—these weren't on the photographs—the television aerials, the advertisement hoardings, the council estates, the new factories, the new roads.

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But by the time the brandy flask was empty and the train was passing through the suburbs of London he had become reconciled to the land and convinced that it was after all perfectly in accord with the English—both beautiful and ugly—that also it was a considered land, an experienced land, an accommodating land, and a *safe* one. He had not been in this land for twenty-five years.

For minutes after the rest of the travellers had pushed up the platform Doctor Halliday sat looking out at the station. Then he stood up, took down a smart new travelling case from the luggage rack, walked slowly out of the compartment and down the corridor of the train. As he got down on to the platform, in spite of the brandy, he began to shiver in the bitter cold. He pulled the collar of his new overcoat up around his neck. It wasn't the season for fruits! A gust of the stale station air whipped down the platforms towards him stinging his face. It was a tough face for the wind to sting—a face for the wind to get at—a peasant face with crag-like brows and large bones. But it was the expression in the eyes that gave Halliday's face dignity and a stamp—a melancholy that set him apart—as if to tell you that the real basis of this man's life, however cynical, or loving, or gay he might be, was work.

A tiny group of reporters and photographers were waiting by the ticket barrier. As soon as they saw Halliday descending on to the platform they set off towards him. Presently he was answering their questions and being photographed. He smiled and joked very pleasantly; they thought him charming. He had drunk just the right amount. When they had finished, Halliday walked up the platform with them. He was half a head the tallest man in the group.

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"Is it going to snow?" he asked the young photographer from the *Sunday Times*.

"I think so."

"That's just what I was hoping to hear." He smiled at her.

At the barrier the reporters hurried off shouting their goodbyes. Halliday looked after the pretty girl hurrying off with the rest. She glanced back: he waved to her. She hesitated; then went on.

Halliday turned to hand over his ticket. He was startled to find that the collector grinning at him was a negro: his cheerfulness disappeared.

"Good afternoon, Sir Benjamin, welcome to England."

"I'm not Sir Benjamin yet."

Halliday was looking so gravely at the negro that the negro said laughing: "Hey, hey, there's nothing the matter with me."

Halliday managed to smile back. "I can see that." He turned away to walk towards the station exit.

"Bless you, Sir Benjamin," the negro called softly after him.

Halliday nodded his head to show he was pleased but he quickered his walk and the expression on his face was that pathetic onc. If the pretty young photographer from the *Sunday Times* had been there to take a photo of him then it would have given a very different impression of Halliday than the one that subsequently appeared in her paper.

Halliday walked towards the taxi rank. He took a card from his wallet and glanced at the address on it. A fat man in a chauffeur's uniform rolled over towards him.

"Excuse me, sir. Excuse me, Doctor Halliday. Mr. Boyd-Smith was to meet you and see you to your house but he's just been taken ill."

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“[?]”

“Yes, sir. Just before we were to come. It’s the flu, sir. Asian flu. Lot of it about. He’s very apologetic, sir. There was no-one else there ready to come, sir. He’s very sorry.”

“I’m sorry for him too,” said Halliday. “But it’s not serious?”

“No, sir. He’s very upset not to meet you, sir. He felt quite poorly.”

“Well, I said they weren’t to bother about me. And thank *you* very much for coming.”

“Can I carry your bag, sir?”

“Thank you.”

The chauffeur opened the door of a large black comfortable car. Halliday climbed in and gave him an address.

“Like the heater full on, sir?”

“Please.”

The car moved down the ramp.

“I suppose your people were responsible for reserving that whole compartment for me on the train!” It was one of those remarks that Halliday was immediately irritated with himself for making—he knew perfectly well who was responsible, and in any case what was the point of making the remark to the fat chauffeur.

“Oh yes, sir, I’m sure they were.”

“They might do better things with their money!”

“Yes, sir.”

They drove across Waterloo Bridge, crossed the Strand, the Aldwych, turned left up Kingsway.

“That’s Television House,” said the fat chauffeur as if he had shares in it. “You won’t have seen that before!”

They passed by Mornington Crescent. He had had a room there in the square behind the tube station when he

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was a student at Guy's. He was about to ask the driver to turn back and drive round the square but his car accelerated to overtake a lorry. That was that moment gone! This road too looked smaller.

By the old Bedford Theatre they turned left up Delancey Street. He looked to see what was on at the theatre. There was one poster—‘To Be Sold’.

They came out of the back streets at the top of the rise, crossed over into Regent's Park and were there. The car turned through the gates into a little square just off the park road, stopped.

Halliday got out of the car before the chauffeur could open the door for him and stood in the square. He found himself looking straight at the stained window of a church. He had not expected it at all. In the square there was a little church. An omen? His face was impassive. He simply regarded the stained window. He turned to look at the rest of the square. It was dominated by the church. The square was joined to the church—of a piece.

The houses were grey stone. His house was number five. He felt childishly pleased it was number five—five had always been his lucky number. He looked at the wet ground—at the grass, at the paving stones, at the soil. It was wet but not that steaming wet. There were no snakes. The mist that was rising was not a green mist. He looked up, and across at the park. Boys were shouting to each other and kicking a football. Boys kicking a football! Abruptly behind him the church clock struck four times: old images rioted through his brain. Back from Orkney, back in Cornwall, his mother led him to Ladock Church ‘to pray for his father's soul’.

The chimes ceased. “Are you all right, sir?” asked the fat chauffeur.

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“Yes, thank you.”

“You’ll not be used to the cold.”

“One moment!”

‘In memory of

John Halliday, lost at sea,

In the neighbourhood of Iceland . . .’

The last signal from the sinking trawler picked up by the rest of the fleet—‘God Bless England’.

Who would send such a message now?

‘. . . lost at sea

In the neighbourhood of Iceland

In the gales of the 8th and 9th of August 1921.’

‘All for the best,’ said his Grandfather Hosken. ‘All for the best.’

About him in London in January 1959, the afternoon grew darker. More lights began to go on in the houses. In tall buildings in Baker Street the windows began to turn a deep yellow. That white clouded sky became yellow, and brooding; seemed to be descending. Halliday felt like putting up his hands to ward it off. What a tiny crowded world! The boys stopped shouting to each other.

He did wish he had known his father just a little longer. And if he had been grown up couldn’t he have helped his father? And perhaps his father could have helped *him*.

Time passed. They stood there.

The streaks and patches of last week’s snow on the roofs in the square, and on the roofs of the houses in the Nash terraces, changed colour. The mist rising from the ground grew impossible to see. Then the buildings, the park, and the yellow glow, were all one: evening had come.

“Right,” said Halliday. The chauffeur walked up to the front door of number five, and rang the bell.

“Very nice around here, sir. Lovely those Nash houses.

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One time they were going to pull 'em all down. Most of 'em are offices at the moment I believe. But I believe they're going to turn them into flats. Cost a lot they say. Fine big windows your house has got."

"Yes."

"I suppose you have to wear a hat all the time where you've come from?"

"Yes."

"Do they still wear those big white helmets?"

"Some do."

"Be in England long, sir?"

"No, not long. I'm just on leave."

"I suppose you'll have to be getting back soon. No rest in your profession."

"That's so."

"Nice to have a change anyway."

"Yes."

"Nothing like a change."

"No."

At the end came that haunting child's vision, always the same: a wreck, battered open and empty, plunging backwards into the grey sea; his father clinging to the rail determined to drown with the ship; and in the sky above, the desolate cry of the gulls, the only mourners present. 'All for the best,' said Grandfather Hosken. 'All for the best.' 'But did he want to drown, Grandfather? Did he want to?' 'He was always looking for a ship to drown in,' said Grandfather Hosken.

In irony, in extreme gentleness now, he waited for the door of the house to open. When it did so an unusual woman stood on the doorstep. She was very feminine, dressed in a warm red, and yet she looked out of place in a city—having something of his own ~~physical~~ manner

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and something of his peasant solidity. But she was not heavy like him. She was light, quiet, and relaxed. A strong woman but not a heavy one. She was dark haired and had a pleasure-giving smile on her face that charmed him. The woman was so warm. And this she communicated as she stood. He wished she had been related to him—he hoped she would speak with a Cornish accent.

“Good evening, sir. I’m your housekeeper.” Halliday was disappointed—but not entirely so: she was not a Londoner—she was an Irishwoman.

“My name’s Joyce, sir. Mrs. Joyce.”

“How do you do.”

“Will you come in then. Let me have the bag.”

“No, no, I’ll carry it,” said Halliday. “What a nice voice you’ve got,” he added, pleased. “It’s the first Irish voice I’ve heard for years. What part of Ireland do you come from?”

“The West coast.”

“Ah. I’ve never been there.”

He went into the hall. “Excuse me, sir,” said the fat chauffeur. “Here’s our telephone number. If I’m not there myself somebody will be available to drive you all the time. I hope you will ring us, sir.”

Halliday took the card. “Thank you very much. As a matter of fact I’d like to do some shopping tomorrow morning. Would you pick me up at eleven?”

“Yes, sir.”

The chauffeur turned away. “Oh, one other thing,” Halliday called after him, shaking his head slightly. “Do you think you could go to a chemist’s for me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Here then, I’ll write out a prescription.”

Presently he gave a note to the chauffeur, signing his

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name, his qualifications and his address at the bottom. "I hope they'll let you have it. It's for myself: I've never practised in England."

"I'll tell them who it's for," said the chauffeur.

"Ready, sir?" asked Mrs. Joyce.

Halliday followed the Irishwoman up a wide stairway to the first floor.

"This is your drawing-room, sir."

It was a gracious room, looking out over the park. A coal and log fire burned in the grate; the central heating also was on. Halliday felt he could take off his overcoat for the first time since he had left the ship.

"A fine room to live in. A beautiful room."

Halliday took off his coat, went over to the fire-place to hold out his hands to the flames, looked up at the painting over the mantelpiece.

"I don't like this painting."

"I'll have it taken down tomorrow."

Halliday was surprised at the decision in her voice—it had sounded as though she herself disliked the painting, and was pleased to be able to get rid of it. He looked at the painting again. It was a painting of Mevagissey harbour—delicate and feminine—perhaps painted by the wife, the lady of the house. Perhaps one of those English women he had been dreaming of last night. "It's too pretty," said Halliday. Then, turning to his housekeeper: "We must shake hands." Gravely they shook hands. He liked the handshake; he liked the feel of that hand—and she had this air of self-possession, which made him want to question her.

"I lit the fire and turned all the heating on because I imagined you might be cold at first."

"Good of you."

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As she smiled at him Halliday felt some sort of recognition pass between them; he grew excited. He looked much younger. "Attractive curtains those are."

"They're new. Mrs. Matthews chose them for you."

"Did you have a lot of work getting it ready for me?"

"The owners left it very clean."

"They've gone to Spain I understand."

"Yes, sir. Mr. and Mrs. Matthews kept coming in to help me."

"I can imagine that."

"They're very fond of you. They said you were a fine man. They said I was to look after you well. But I don't suppose you'll be here long." There was a pause; there had been something unconventional about her remarks. Then: "Would you like to be seeing over the rest of the house?" she asked. "Or wait a bit."

"Later. When I'm warmed up. Do you smoke?"

"No thank you, sir, or very rarely."

Halliday lit himself a cigarette.

"Several persons rung up for you. I told them I didn't know the exact time when you were arriving and asked them to ring again tomorrow. I've written it all down on the pad by the telephone. Mr. and Mrs. Matthews would like you to have dinner with them tomorrow evening if you're not doing anything else."

"Good, I will. You can take my bag if you like. Better air my pyjamas. The rest of the things will be here in the morning."

"Would you care for a cup of tea?"

"I would."

Mrs. Joyce picked up the suitcase. She stopped by the door: "There's a bell if you want anything."

"Thank you."

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Mrs. Joyce went out.

What was her husband like? It would be very embarrassing if one made the wrong kind of advance to an apparently unsophisticated woman like this. But was she unsophisticated? Difficult to make an advance. Just how would it be done? Directly? Then perhaps a direct refusal. He wouldn't enjoy that!

Halliday glanced around the room. He liked the shape of it. It was very different from his room in Katopos or Friday's hut in Manda. He felt cheerful; he sang softly from one of Syani's songs—another housekeeper in another world, a more exotic housekeeper than this Irish one—but all the same . . .

*“Little boy, little boy, kirijakija
What have you come to do?
What have you come to do?”*

There was only one thing for him and Syani to do.

Halliday walked over to a cabinet in a corner of the room and looked in: it was full of bottles of all kinds. Well done, young Matthews! He bent down to pour himself another brandy. After he had done so, again he was forced to shake his head slowly from side to side as if to clear it. He was glad he had sent the fat chauffeur off to the chemist's—he must make sure of sleeping tonight.

Glancing around once more at this elegant room, and now even more delighted with it, he began to sing another negro song of Syani's—a song she sang when she was pleased and satisfied.

*“Umm. Umm. I am not used to this.
Umm. Umm. I am not used to this.”*

He picked up his brandy and went over to warm his back by the fire. He seemed to grow even larger in the heat.

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The front-door bell rang: there was a knock on the drawing-room door. "Come in."

A little girl came in, with fair curly hair and large brown eyes.

"Mummy says here's a parcel for you."

"Oh, thank you."

"I'll put it on the table, shall I?"

"Yes, please."

"All right then." The little girl turned to go. "You're very big, aren't you?"

"Yes. What's your name?"

"Deborah."

"Deborah Joyce?"

"Deborah Anne Joyce." The little girl ran towards the door.

"Goodbye then."

"Goodbye. See you tomorrow," said the little girl, and went, carefully closing the door behind her.

Halliday opened the parcel: it was the bottle of sleeping pills from the chemist. Inside was a note—"Dear Sir Benjamin, May I congratulate you . . . Only yesterday I was reading about your work in Africa . . ."

When Mrs. Joyce arrived with the tea Halliday said:

"What a charming little girl you've got."

"She's that."

"Have you any other children?"

"She's the only one."

"Is your husband staying here too?"

There was a slight pause. Then: "No. He's not," said the Irishwoman.

Halliday changed the subject: "It's much quieter here than I'd imagined."

"A lot of traffic passes in the rush hour. And in the

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mornings. There's a lot of starlings outside your bedroom window early. Sugar and milk?"

"No sugar. I suppose I shall wake early at first. It's extraordinary the difference in the colours."

"Outside?"

"Yes. I watched the dusk come down. I watched the land all the way up from Southampton. Incredible! I haven't taken it in yet."

Halliday took his cup of tea from Mrs. Joyce, put it on the mantelshelf beside his brandy, lit himself yet another cigarette. Looking shyly at the Irishwoman he said hesitantly, as if he had no right to impose upon her and wasn't sure if she would stay to listen, and moreover did not himself quite know what he was going to talk about: "You see, roughly speaking, I've got used to three kinds of country—first, and not so important, the country that greets you when you drive out of Luanda—it's fifty miles, you know, of arid plain. The town itself is modern enough—quite smart in places—Cidade da Buganvillas they call it—for the tourists' sake. It seems on the surface to be European—after all it's the oldest European city south of the Sahara. The archbishop's palace is salmon pink—the Governor's next door is lemon yellow. The old forts still dominate the harbour, but the shops are chic—*très chic*. You'd like them I expect."

Mrs. Joyce laughed: a rich laugh. Halliday was pleased by her laugh but he realised it was an unusual conversation for him to be having; he had certainly not spoken to anyone on the ship like this. He went on talking, relaxed now. "Oh yes, it's probably the nicest city for Europeans on the West coast of Africa. I mean it looks like a city—forty-five thousand white men in Luanda. The taxes are high—or so the business men tell me. There's only one

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bank, but it's a very rich bank, because it's the only bank. It keeps its credit squeezed tight. There are three newspapers yet it's hard to buy yourself a good book in any language. The gardens are very well kept—it's not hard to get a gardener you know—very cheap are the gardeners. But when you leave that ironic city, Mrs. Joyce, and you go up over the hill, and down past the poor quarter, the prospect before you is somewhat more daunting: fifty miles of flat dry grass stretching out before you; and on that arid plain stand the Baobab trees. Like a surrealist painting! Sometimes when I drove home across that plain from Luanda it seemed to me to be the lowest place on earth. It seemed . . ." Halliday paused; it had occurred to him he must not bore Mrs. Joyce. He considered her and saw he had not. "Of course I only crossed the plain once or twice a year—some years not at all. A dry moon-like land spiked with Baobab trees and thorn bushes so different from our own place—by the hospital—for there you see . . ." Halliday paused again; he had realised where the conversation was leading him.

"Go on," said Mrs. Joyce.

"Yes," said Halliday, and now his features were so animated he might have been fevered. "There in Katopos, plant, bird, insect, reptile and beast wind themselves together, reproduce and decay, and struggle, struggle in a multitude of embraces. You get such an aversion to it all. There's no end you see. Everything's writhing towards the sun. It's impossible: that soil, that vegetation! The birds are as brilliant as butterflies; the butterflies are bigger than birds. And the wooden huts in the clearings *grow*! Why, on my hospital, my hospital, the roof-tops keep breaking into bud!" He paused again. Then: "But even Katopos, even Katopos has nothing on the marshes to the

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north-east, the swamps—nothing on Manda—for there you see . . . there in the village of Manda . . . there in the heart of the swamp . . .” Halliday stopped talking. He forced himself to. He told himself he must not proceed any further in that direction. He knew if he did he would find himself breaking down before his new housekeeper. He wondered to himself when the pain might grow less—if ever again in his life he would spend a whole day cheerfully, naturally, and unobsessed.

To her it seemed that he was drunk. He recognised the look in her eyes, defensively took another sip of his brandy. And as if to bear out one of his beliefs—that all momentous decisions are made, or are begun to be made, in the sub-conscious—glancing nervously at Mrs. Joyce he asked: “Have you any idea who would be the best tailor in London?”

Halliday lay in a bath. The bathroom too was elegant. It was a pink bathroom with a dark green carpet on the floor: that feminine hand—yet somehow a more appropriate hand here than in the painting of the Cornish fishing village of Mevagissey. One of his uncles had lived in Mevagissey—another fisherman—and had sent his mother a little money from time to time. And that was where the Pawlyns lived: tall boys like himself but with far more pocket money than any of the other boys at Truro School. So Mevagissey always made him think of money when he was a child.

*“High on the hill with the city below
Up in the sunshine we live.”*

Halliday laughed: the school song had always been a joke with the boys at Truro—except that they liked the

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tune. Whenever they sang it on Speech Days or at beginning of term the rain blew in from the Atlantic and poured down on to the Chapel. It always seemed to be raining in Truro when he was a boy; perhaps it was different now. They had been good to him at Truro. Everyone knew the story of his father's drowning; when the school gave him a boarding scholarship his mother had only to pay for his clothes. Three schools he had been to: Ladock Church, Stromness Academy and Truro. He'd liked Truro. Perhaps he would go back to Truro and see if any of the masters he knew were still there. Thirty-five years! The music master would still be there—unless he had died; music masters always stayed at Truro until they died.

The water grew colder: Halliday turned on the hot tap to keep it at the right temperature. He flexed his limbs. He must look incongruous in this pink bathroom! He imagined that the lady of the house—the lady of the bathroom—was blonde, young, and pretty; and spoke gently like . . . like the girl in *The Tatler*. So that was the face he had been dreaming about! He grinned, then became absorbed in the romantic image that had so long been his. At this moment he was filled with tenderness, and longing, thinking of what he would feel, and say, and what he and this idealised woman might do together. He seemed to be becoming able at last to picture exactly what he wanted. The woman he saw was always young.

When he heard Mrs. Joyce pass by the bathroom door it occurred to him that it would be hard to keep up any sort of pretence with her. Sooner or later, he realised, he would have to talk to someone, and could imagine himself talking to her. He remembered Alejo saying once: "It's a great gift to know who to confide in."

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Halliday wished he had married long ago. He didn't feel it sentimental of him to wonder if things would have gone differently in Katopos if he had had some woman to share problems with. No, that was not altogether a sentimental thought. Certainly in Africa his needs of women had to some extent been met. Well, affection, yes, passion, yes—nobody could smile more affectionately than Syani—an exciting smile, a passionate smile—but not what you'd call sharing. Halliday frowned. When he was thinking such thoughts as these, his face had a bewildered look on it.

"I shall want to look civilised." He had spoken aloud. He had remembered the most civilised man he had ever seen: Joseph Conrad. He had had the luck once to see Conrad talking to a friend on a street corner in London. He had watched the aristocratic old gentleman until the conversation had ended. He had been struck by the discipline in that face. Was Joseph Conrad forgotten? Where was he now? It had been a Spring day. And the street? Newport Street.

What kind of diversion might he create for himself? What sort of people would he seek out? Not his own profession anyway. Artists perhaps—sculptors, writers, painters, actors. Why not? He had never known any. Not musicians—musicians were too dull—or so he'd heard. Another image flashed into his mind: that squat, charmless pianist in the film they had shown on the ship bowing low, acknowledging the applause. Halliday grimaced; then smiled at his own naïvety—they couldn't all be as bad as that. Still, he had looked unfortunate in that seal-skin dinner jacket.

He wiped the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand. In England perhaps the artists were as defeated as

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himself. Perhaps not. He hoped not. Although he had decided to get out of the bath, for a moment he lay in the water staring up at the ceiling, a monumental figure, his features like some warrior's, his brooding eyes seeming to be almost falling out of his head with weariness, and finally that grimace, all his own, that had in it something of the defeated, and at the same time something of the egocentric child.

The water began to make a hissing sound as the bath emptied. A man like him could go mad. He *was* mad. Into his mind came another memory—the memory of Joe Pearce, one of the farm labourers in Ladock who had gone mad. He too had hissed, he too had been a big man with a peasant face. He too had had huge hands. He would walk across the village green, his shoulders pulled back, his chin thrust up into the sky, his martyred eyes apparently staring straight at the sun. Sometimes when the sun was bright he would go berserk by the swings. Then Mr. Chapman would run out of his shop with a broom while the children huddled together for protection. If Pearce advanced towards the children Chapman would rush in between, pointing his broom at Pearce's chest as if it were a shotgun and crying out nervously "Now, Mr. Pearce! Calm down, my dear. Calm down."

But when the months grew colder a knowing look would come over Pearce's face and he would be heard hissing and giggling to himself, and one morning about eleven o'clock he would run down the main road in Ladock, delightedly exposing himself to all the housewives at their windows, and the policeman would come over from Probus and take him off to Bodmin Asylum until the Spring came again.

There was method in that—Halliday could see it

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now. They always said in Ladock that Pearce went mad through love, but Halliday's father had maintained it was because Pearce's family wouldn't let him go to sea and be a sailor. Father always took the romantic view. I'm getting closer to Father every day, thought Halliday sardonically.

Halliday got out of the bath, wrapped two large warmed towels around him and sat down on the stool. A whole evening stretched out before him and nothing to do with it. He would take those pills and go to bed. He stood up and began to towel himself. He found himself getting breathless. That was what accounted for all this meandering. It was the second time this evening he had felt breathless. Perhaps he was due for a bout of fever. Perhaps too the change of climate was affecting him. The bathroom spun, the ship's engines pounded in his ears. He found it difficult to remain standing and he sat down again with his head between his knees until the dizziness passed.

He was in his bedroom looking at the books on the shelves when there was a knock at the door.

"There's a lady on the telephone from *The Observer*, sir. She would like to speak to you."

"Oh yes. What's she called?"

"Miss Armitage."

"Does this phone in here work?"

"Yes, sir. The bell's turned off. That's all."

Halliday sat on the double-bed and picked up the phone beside it. One thing, this bed looked long enough to contain him.

"Hello."

"Hello, Doctor Halliday, this is Miss Helena Armitage."

The voice was as deep as a man's and very, very Eng-

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lish. "I am telephoning to ask you if you would be so kind as to let me come and see you shortly. I have undertaken to do an *Observer* profile on you and so there are one or two facts I should like to be better acquainted with. What is more I should be most enchanted to meet you."

"So you shall then."

"Ah. Good. When do you suggest? Might we have lunch tomorrow?"

"Not tomorrow. Why don't you come round now and get it over with." There was something about Halliday's voice when he made such apparently abrupt remarks as these that rendered them inoffensive.

"Excellent," said Miss Armitage. "Excellent. And where are you living?" Halliday told her.

He put down the phone. He began to brush his red hair. He paused, to look at himself in the mirror: he was fatter in the face. His toughness had unmistakably begun to dissolve. He must weigh himself tomorrow. Of course you could never tell quite what you looked like, never tell what impression you really gave. The only time you look at yourself is in a mirror and that is flat on. He hadn't seen himself in a full-length mirror for many years—not since he was a student in London. He was tempted to take off all his clothes again and study himself but then he was unexpectedly amused at himself and laughed out loud. Some other time! He set off to the drawing-room to pour himself another drink. As he did so it occurred to him that that flat-on impression in the mirror is exactly the impression one gives to most other people.

He was standing with his back to the fire sipping brandy when Mrs. Joyce knocked on the door and came in. She glanced dispassionately at the glass in his hand.

"Here are your keys, sir. They're all labelled."

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“Thank you.”

“Would you like to look at the house or will you wait till tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow.”

“And there’s a study for you on the top floor.”

“Good.”

“Now this evening—will you be going out to dinner?”

“Could you cook something for me after Miss Armitage has gone? Anything—I’m not very hungry.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Will you have a drink?”

“No thank you, sir.”

“They’re rather nice glasses these. I’d like to buy some good glass. It’s always interested me. Do you like glass?”

“I’ve never thought about it.”

“Ah well, I’m a collector. I’ve always liked collecting things. Birds’ eggs when I was a boy. In Africa, wood: carvings, bits of trees. You ought to look closely at a piece of good glass sometimes. It’s exciting. You can hold it in your hands, blow on it, knock it with your fingers, listen to its sounds. Each person makes a different sound—you can tell a man’s fortune with good glass.”

Halliday glanced curiously at Mrs. Joyce; he had expected to have disconcerted her—had half hoped to. But he had not.

“I’m a romantic man—or was; the seeds are left—drying up though. My father was a romantic figure—a sailor—a Cornishman—worked on a trawler. My mother followed him to the Orkney Islands—he was working on a ship that was based there for a few years—a drifter. We lived there till he was drowned. Then we went back to Cornwall. He was a melancholic. A drunk.”

There was a pause. Mrs. Joyce remained silent.

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"You remind me of my mother," said Halliday. Mrs. Joyce made no comment.

"What did your people do?"

"Worked on a farm. When there was work."

"So did my mother—when we went back to Cornwall. I did too in the holidays—paid for my clothes that way. Your parents still in Ireland?"

"They are."

"And your husband?"

"I haven't got one," said Mrs. Joyce. "I came to England when I was going to have a baby. There's a lot of unmarried Irish mothers in England."

Halliday was the one who was disconcerted.

"They don't understand about things like that where I lived," said Mrs. Joyce. "That's why we all come over. I didn't want to marry him. I should have had more sense in the first place." Then: "Are you lonely?" she said abruptly.

There was a pause. Then: "Yes," he said. "Why do you ask?"

Mrs. Joyce did not answer. She thought for a moment she had had no right to ask such a question. But she wanted to see what he would say. She was glad he had said: "Yes." She felt shy. The huge fire needed more wood or coal but she did not make a move towards it. She stood there staring at Halliday. The flames burned lower and lower.

"My people don't know about the baby," she said slowly.

"Sit down, eh?"

"Yes."

She sat. She touched the lines on her forehead with her right hand as she sat. She shivered a little.

Still the flames burned lower; soon the fire would go

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out. There was only a small lamp on in the room, its shadows were soft, it threw a kind light on her face. Halliday saw that she had become beautiful. He found himself wondering about her whole life but had no desire to ask her a question. He seemed to be trying to feel—as if he sensed that should he look at this woman long enough he would know all about her without having to ask any questions. That depressing sense of unreality that had so affected him had gone. He was absorbed by the woman beside him.

She was silent: she too seemed to be trying to feel—to reconstruct. But somehow she was succeeding better than him. That was what Halliday suddenly realised.

A small piece of charred wood fell off a pile of ashes on to its back in a corner of the fire-place, flamed briefly, burned itself out.

And now he grew irritated: he had sensed an inadequacy in himself that this woman beside him did not have. His mood changed sharply and in a slightly resentful tone he demanded: "What's your Christian name?"

"Aileen."

"Yes:"

"Don't worry," said Mrs. Joyce. And smiled.

"I'm not," said Halliday. "I'm not. I . . ." Then, softening again, he was about to ask her something enormously important to him—something he felt this woman knew—but the front-door bell was rung very firmly indeed.

When Mrs. Joyce showed Miss Armitage into the drawing-room, Halliday was busy building up the fire. As he stood up from the fire to look at Miss Armitage he decided

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not to switch on any more of the lights: the old lady seemed to him at once to be a curious and a perceptive one.

She scuttled across the huge room towards him with an outstretched hand.

“How d’you do, Doctor Halliday. I am Helena Armitage. So good of you to see me!”

“You were very quick.”

“I live so near.”

Again that deep firm voice, but Miss Armitage was older than he’d imagined. She reminded him of a Chinese Mandarin: her skin wrinkled and yellow. Yet the eyes were alert and her movements bird-like and quick. She had left her coat in the hall downstairs and was wearing a long mauve dress, but for some reason had kept on her hat—a large black felt hat with strawberries on the top of it. Once she had seated herself he expected her to take off this bizarre hat but she did nothing of the kind. She put her head on one side and surveyed him. He had a picture of her sitting in a front pew and so surveying the new vicar as he got up to preach his maiden sermon.

“I keep my hat on because I am losing my hair,” she said, obviously feeling that the information was necessary.

“Oh yes.”

“You do like it hot.”

She reminded him of someone. Perhaps everyone in England was going to. But in this case he couldn’t place for the moment who it was.

“I was reading the other day that some young medical students had found it harder to acclimatise themselves to the English weather on their return from Africa than they did to the heat of the Congo.”

Suppose he took a wife back to Katopos? Syani would object no doubt, but would also understand. Syani had

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provided sex admirably. And he had for her. But that was all. Mind you, Syani had stayed with him. She could have gone to Luanda. Or married. She would not have found it hard to find a husband. And Syani *had* on occasion been able to lose herself. So what did he want from a wife exactly? What hope for? He had never been able to lose himself with a woman. Not even when he was a student at Guy's with Frances Irving, although she had so obsessed him. Perhaps somewhere deep down he despised women. Could you love women *and* despise them? Could a virile, passionate man also be an impotent one? He found himself speculating on the true nature of this word 'impotent'. Could it be that a man like himself, so attracted and so attractive to women, who so wished to 'give', who had seen others succeed, who believed it was essential, who wanted to have a complete relationship with a woman, a sharing, more than anything else he could think of—could it be that he of all people would never achieve it?

"Yes," he said and tried to concentrate on the old lady before him.

"I expect you find the English countryside very dead. I do remember when I returned to England in the middle of Winter from Japan some years ago how peculiarly appalled I was to find all nature dead. I could not get used to it, do you know. The deadness made me feel mortal for the first time in my life, suddenly returning to it like that. I was profoundly depressed. However, I cannot say if it would have the same effect upon me now. And then I do remember there was the most glorious Spring."

He had realised who she reminded him of: Bertrand Russell, a Chinese Bertrand Russell in a mauve dress. And of course really he never had believed in God.

"What will you have to drink?"

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“Vodka.”

“Let me look.” He went over to the cabinet. “Yes, we seem to have everything.”

“Good,” said the old lady. “I had no idea you were so big. It is strange that you are red-haired and so sunburned and yet you have no freckles.”

“They must have all burned away.” Halliday grinned.

As he brought her drink over to the sofa the old lady leered at him as if she thought an apparent geniality might conceal the ruthlessness of her intention to arrive at what she considered to be ‘the facts’.

“Might I ask you a few questions, Doctor Halliday?”

“That’s what you’re here for isn’t it?”

She loved asking questions—no doubt that’s what had kept her going so long. But going where? Once *this* question had formed itself it became insistent as if it expected Halliday to provide an immediate answer. However, he heard himself insisting that he would be delighted to give her any information she required, absolutely delighted. And then he found it hard not to burst out laughing and was filled with a desire to kneel down beside the old lady and to whisper into her ear the catch-phrase of a comedian the boys used to call out at Ladock School that Summer so long ago: “Can you hear me, Mother?”

“Are you a religious man?” Halliday was startled; it was exactly the question that fitted the situation.

“No,” he said slowly. “I’m not.”

“Do you believe in God?”

“Not quite in that way.”

“In what way?”

“The idea of a creative force affected me sometimes, but other things have affected me more. Far more.”

“What things?” asked the old lady.

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“Human beings—how they suffer—how little they can live. But I can’t find a tangible reason for it all. None of the explanations I’ve ever heard mean very much to me—none of the churches’ affirmations are relevant. Perhaps I am unlucky in these matters.”

“You follow Christian principles?”

“They seem to be the best.” He smiled at Miss Armitage. “I’m a stupid man. Very limited vision I think. One of those abused liberals. Human suffering has always provoked a greater reaction in me than anything else. Of course one gets tired of it in the end.”

“Yes?”

“Oh yes.” He got up from his chair and stood with his back to the old lady staring into the fire, then knelt down and wearily added another log to it as if to show that that was what he had turned away from. But finally turning back he said hesitantly: “There is nothing new any of us can say, is there? We can only reaffirm. I have believed in human progress. For me the important thing was to be alive.” He knew well that what he was saying was totally inadequate

“Why do you keep using the past tense?”

“I don’t know. Society’s so corrupt isn’t it? Sometimes I don’t know why one bothers. Power’s generally in the wrong hands. Because of the nature of success, eh? Of course it’s the duty of the healthy to look after the diseased. It’s nearly always the other way about. I think . . .” He paused. “I’m not going to generalise. I always do that when I’m tired.” He paused again, trying to shut out those concrete images behind his generalisations. “Death is the important fact. And the idea of death.

“For he knoweth whereof we are made: he remembereth we are but dust.

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*The days of man are but as grass: for he
flourisheth as a flower of the field.*

*For as soon as the wind goeth over it, it is gone:
and the place thereof shall know it no more.”*

“Yes,” said Miss Armitage gently. “I like those old Jews. They didn’t always concern themselves with immortality, did they? You’re pale beneath your sun-tan. I know you’re tired.”

The telephone rang. To Halliday it was a most unusual sound. A menacing sound. He stared at it as if he couldn’t quite make up his mind whether he had any responsibility to the sound or not. Since the phone kept on ringing he walked over and picked up the receiver.

“Excuse me. Hello.”

He had never liked the telephone. It had always made him nervous in his student days in London to ring up some girl. He had got into the habit then of making faces to himself as he talked. Particularly if he suspected that the girl was uninterested or had already arranged to go out with someone else. He thought of Frances Irving. How insecure he had been with Frances. FLAXMAN 1809—he’d remember that telephone number all his life. Christ, it was twenty-seven years ago.

“Is that Doctor Halliday?”

“It is.”

“This is James Boyd-Smith.”

“Boyd-Smith? Oh yes, Boyd-Smith.”

“Yes. Doctor Halliday, I am just ringing you to apologise.”

“You’re in bed I hope?”

“Yes, sir. I am sorry I didn’t meet you at the station but I suddenly felt most awfully ill.”

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"You go off to sleep then."

"Yes, sir. But if there's anything I can do. I . . ."

"Ring me when you're well."

"Yes, sir. Goodnight, sir."

"Goodnight. Doctor been to see you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Goodnight then." Halliday was about to hang up when he heard the voice on the other end of the line say hurriedly and nervously:

"Excuse me, sir, but could I come and see you some time . . . I want to ask your advice."

"About what?"

"About going to Africa to work . . . to do something worthwhile."

Then Halliday heard a young woman shout out angrily at his caller and for a moment the phone went dead as Mr. Boyd-Smith at the other end of the line put his hand over the mouthpiece. Halliday waited. Presently Mr. Boyd-Smith spoke again—apologetically: "Are you still there, Doctor Halliday?"

"I am."

"I'm terribly sorry. I've been having a bit of a row with my wife."

"Never mind."

"I would still like to come and see you."

"When do you want to come?"

"Friday?"

"Friday afternoon. At four o'clock?"

"Thank you, sir. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Mr. Smith."

Perhaps a wife would not after all be the solution! Halliday was smiling as he turned back to Miss Armitage. Miss Armitage had opened her handbag, taken out a

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fountain-pen and a notebook, and had put on her glasses. She was changed in her glasses.

“Doctor,” she said in a business-like tone. “Let me have a few details to jot down before I hurry off. Why did you choose Africa?” Suddenly she looked efficient and not bizarre at all.

“When I was a student at Guy’s Doctor Gama was there doing research. It was his idea to go out to Angola. Two of us went with him when we qualified—Alastair Fraser came too but he died. We were young, Alastair and I; it seemed a romantic thing to do. And Alejo is a very persuasive man—now *he’s* a religious man!”

“A Catholic?”

“Yes.”

“How long will you be staying in London?”

“The Investiture’s on Friday.”

“But you’ll have a holiday?”

“I’d like to.”

“You must.”

“Yes.”

The old lady adjusted her position on the sofa. “How old are you now?”

“Forty-eight.”

“And how many doctors have you working with you in Katopos?”

“Doctor Gama, two young fellows and myself. One of them’s another Englishman, Bennett.”

“Do you leave the hospital often? Go out and about?”

“The natives come to us. The villages at the foot of the hill grow and grow. The hospital’s built halfway up a hill. It looks down on a river.”

“It must have been an enormous labour to build the hospital.”

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"It was."

"Excuse me I'm hot." Miss Armitage took off her spectacles, opened her handbag, looked inside it, took out a handkerchief and began to mop her forehead. Halliday's thoughts wandered back to the years of building. It had been *his* labour. He had forced himself to work even harder after Alastair's death. "Don't go back to England," Alastair had implored him. So he had been left alone in charge of the workers while Alejo had looked after their health and their souls. He had built the hospital almost with his bare hands. For three years he had done no medical work at all. But it was perhaps now to be remembered as the happiest time of his life.

"An extraordinary feat of personal strength and endurance I believe," said the old lady, replacing her spectacles.

"The building stands," said Halliday.

Outside the door of the room they heard a little girl call out nervously: "Charlie! Charlie!"

Halliday walked over and opened the door. Mrs. Joyce's fair-haired little daughter was standing in the corridor. She stared nervously up at the huge man. "I was looking for my cat. I think he went in your bedroom."

She was wearing a dressing gown and pyjamas but had no slippers on her feet.

"You shouldn't go around bare-footed on these cold floors."

"No. I know. I won't again. I was looking for Charlie. He sleeps in my bed."

Impulsively Halliday picked the little girl up in his arms and hugged her. Then realising he might have frightened her he said gently: "If ever you get bored

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or lonely come and see me, will you?" He put her down.

"Will you?"

"Yes," said the little girl.

"Goodnight, Debby," said Halliday and went back into the drawing-room, closing the door behind him.

"My housekeeper's daughter," he said. "Lost her cat. Of course we've had some financial help from the Portuguese Government since the war. We've built a new wing. But the old block's still the heart of the matter." 'The heart of the matter.' How could anything be the heart of the matter? "I've got some photographs in my brief-case," he said abstractedly. "Would you like to see them?"

"I should be enchanted."

In the corridor leading to his bedroom it was colder. He noticed it right away. But he couldn't see the footmarks of a cat on the thick carpet. On his right a pendulum swung to and fro in a clock case. The dials of the clock were surrounded with copper figures representing the ages of man. But none of them were negroes. It made an unpleasant sound, that clock. He shivered. He would have it removed. How was he going to warm this corridor? Was it Monday or Tuesday? The corridor seemed so much longer and colder than before. He rubbed his hand against his forehead. Fever? Now he passed a plant hanging down from the wall in a basket. It looked darkly rich. Like the swamp. Decadent like the swamp. Well, he couldn't get rid of everything. And perhaps the little girl liked it. Deborah. A dear little girl. Once in the bedroom he went unhesitatingly to the bed, pulled back the counterpane, took up a large batch of the photographs from underneath the pillow. He had replaced the pillow and the counterpane and started back to the drawing-room when he stopped,

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appalled at himself. Why on earth had he put the photographs under his pillow?

He stood still. He turned once again to that huge mirror and studied himself in it. He was not reassured by the mirror. His features were set in that wretched mask. And even when he forced himself to smile cynically at the mirror the features soon relapsed.

He was so tired he didn't know what he was doing. He must have something to put him out. He went back to his brief-case. Then, thinking he had better wait till the old lady had gone, he put the bottle of pills in his pocket and for the second time started off for the drawing-room.

Once more he shivered in the corridor. But when he saw a cat creeping along the corridor ahead of him he shooed it down the stairs. "Go on, Charlie," he said. "Get to bed."

"Here you are." He untied the parcel of photographs and handed a small bundle to Miss Armitage.

She was peering gravely at the first photo: a long low narrow structure on a terrace cut out of a hillside, surrounded on three sides by tropical jungle; little groups of negroes, some carrying the sick on their backs, or on rough litters, were struggling up the hillside towards the building. Next a picture of a room: screened windows without glass, two narrow iron beds, an old-fashioned wash-stand, a basket chair, a shelf and a table.

"How many rooms like this?"

"Twenty-five."

"Bare and simple as it is, it looks pleasant."

"Cross ventilation."

"No electric light?"

"Not at the time that was taken."

Miss Armitage looked at pictures of an open drain; of a

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graveyard with little crosses; of the leper village Halliday had built later on the far side of the hill. And at the picture of the frail old man.

"You said Doctor da Gama was a Catholic?"

"Yes. A dedicated and a simple man. An uncomplicated man. He thinks all doctors must be happy if they keep at their work."

She looked at the two main wards of the hospital—long low rooms divided into cubicles like an old dormitory in an English public school. The patients lay on the floor. But in the more recent photos the patients were lying on wooden benches covered with matting. And outside these cubicles, on the corridors of earth running down the middle of the wards, small fires were burning. And men and women were cooking by these fires.

"The fires burn the mosquitoes out," said Halliday. He raised his head: somewhere in an African marsh Kamante cried out. 'Sh. Sh. Nothing to be frightened of, Kamante.'

"You see, Miss Armitage, if a patient is on his own, no family to cook for him, and too sick to cook for himself, it makes a lot more work for us: they'll only accept food from their own tribe—afraid of being poisoned."

"Your equipment looks primitive."

"Not so bad now." In the water behind Kamante the negroes of the village of Manda lay covering their eyes. Primitive? "We used to have to boil all the water in kettles, prop 'em up on stones over the wood fires. For years we had hardly any drugs, lint or bandages. Everything was precious—safety-pins like diamonds. Of course you don't want things to be too modern or complicated anyway—you've got to make them feel at home—they're easier to heal if they feel at home."

Miss Armitage picked up another photo. In the open

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air Halliday was at work scraping a man's leg on a stone. The leg looked as if it were covered by fungi. Then, a picture of a naked black, his abdomen covered with blood.

"I want to see them all," said the old lady resolutely, and put out her hand for another batch. Not all, thought Halliday, you can't see them all, old lady. He went on handing her photographs but when he came to a large envelope he put it aside on the arm of his chair.

"Let me look," said Miss Armitage sharply.

"You don't want any of these. Pictures of the insane."

"Oh, please."

"This is the sort of thing." He passed one from those he still held in his hand, but not from the envelope on the chair. The photograph was of a young negress. She was sitting, hands clutching breasts, hair encased in dried mud, staring into space, and the staring eyes were ringed with white.

"We have cells for the insane—have to lock them up not only to protect ourselves but to protect *them*. Their families would murder them. She's quite harmless, that child."

"Poor little soul," said Miss Armitage.

"Here's a picture of a whole tribe come for treatment—their camp is near the hospital." Negroes were busy carrying their goods on crude barrows, were hunched on the ground binding palm leaves, were sewing, were pressing their washing with rough irons. Halliday himself stood in the centre of the clearing seemingly making sure that everyone worked.

"What are they binding the palm leaves for?"

"Roofing."

"Am I right in thinking that communities in Africa once dying are now alive again and flourishing?"

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“Yes. Give us the money and the drugs and we can turn Africa into as healthy a place as anywhere else. And the help of course.”

“But you live in the unhealthiest part of Africa?”

“To some extent.”

“And what you want is money?”

“Like everyone else.”

Halliday handed over more and more photographs. As she peered at these photographs Miss Armitage was able to reconstruct for herself Halliday’s labours, his daily routine, and to sense something of his vast acquaintance with death. When she had put them down she looked up at him and nodded her head. It was a respectful gesture.

“I’ll send you a copy of a lecture I’m going to give at Guy’s,” said Halliday. “You’ll be able to pick out the relevant facts—make some appeal for us perhaps. Quote a few statistics. I don’t want to bore you. But you know, thirty miles from Katopos you could walk along a path and the people you pass would be the only healthy people in that district. The rest are in the villages lying on their backs.”

He turned away again from Miss Armitage, then suddenly with a revival of his energies he said to her warmly: “I like old ladies.”

“You do?”

“They keep sending us money. And you know some of those old black ladies in North Angola are as tough as anyone on earth—once they’ve lived that long. They’ve borne so many children, seen so many die, lived so hard, starved, you feel nothing will ever destroy them now. An incredible love of life. And when you make them laugh they shake from head to foot with joy and cackle at you.”

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“Yes?”

“They’re very grateful. They love you when you’re a help to them.” He poured himself another drink. “Perhaps people are interested in Africa because it’s so close to the earth.”

“I heard from some friends who visited Katopos once that you paint.”

“I did paint years ago—it made me happy. Further up the hill . . . further up the hill above the hospital there’s a peaceful place. Not like the rest because there’s a volcanic outcrop there. Strange shapes—strong. Sometimes when I was young I used to climb up there—there was so much to look down on—far-away tall hills. You can look straight into the middle of Africa. Sometimes I sat there remembering England—I like England—I used to think of England swimming slowly northwards in the cold sea like a whale. And of all the people and villages I had known on its great green back. Impossibly far away but not to be forgotten. I used to try and weigh it up on the hillside. I wished I had been better educated . . . more broadly educated . . . I do like people sometimes . . . people who have died . . . some people make me . . . affect me . . . what they were . . . some people . . . I . . .” Halliday knew he was being carried off again—he didn’t want to be. Miss Armitage was more rational, more intelligent and would be more analytical than Mrs. Joyce.

“I mean,” he said distractedly, “people were kind to me. But at school they didn’t teach us enough of ourselves—perhaps they couldn’t. Perhaps they do now. I was hemmed in by mysteries as a boy—I had a chance to think about them up there. Occasionally Alejo would wander up to talk of God.” Halliday smiled. “He talks of God very well. It is a most charming idea if one can say

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such a thing without offence. But it was odd you know, all that remembering—for one so young.”

“You haven’t told me about your painting.”

“Oh well . . . yes. Nothing to tell really. Extraordinary colours up there. One of our nurses gave me some hard-board and some paints once. An American girl with a passion for hygiene. I liked painting up there. I often used to think this is the place I would like to die in.” And now he saw his body being borne up the hill by chanting negroes, honoured and cured by the sun and the wind according to custom. And then somebody had dropped him. The negroes on the hill started to dance. ‘John Halliday—lost at sea in the neighbourhood of Iceland?’ “Oh Jesus Christ,” said Halliday. And started to laugh.

“What is amusing?”

“I really don’t know. Have another drink.”

“Thank you.” Halliday gave her another drink. He noticed that the old lady’s face was flushed and there was a sparkle in her eyes.

“I musn’t get drunk,” she said. “Were you lonely out there?”

“Yes. Alejo wasn’t. He says Europeans are crippled.”

“Why?”

“He insists we’ve lost the sense of our beginnings—that the soil means nothing any more. ‘Out here,’ he’ll say, ‘the land is personal and timeless. You can rediscover yourself.’ But I am more complex than him.”

“I read once you believe very much in personality—in the personality of the healer, that is. True?”

“It can be the deciding factor.” It had certainly been the deciding factor in Kamante’s case.

“How do the negroes’ minds differ from ours?”

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"The negroes' minds?" Was she mocking? Did she know? "The negroes' minds?"

"Yes."

"Most of the time you deal with their bodies."

"And the other times?"

"If you can heal a man's body you're content to let him look after his own . . . his own soul . . . naturally. Or I am," Halliday said quickly. "So many charlatans about!" But he was one himself. "If the soul and the body are indivisible in the illness in the middle of Africa you proceed warily, eh? Trial and error, eh? You pick things up of course. Experience means you take your time—eh—one has heard many cries of pain—scratch beneath the surface and you usually surprise yourself—here in London just as much I suppose."

"Where do you stand politically?"

Halliday sighed.

"As far as I'm concerned let them be made well—I have a medical view. If I were black I'd be the most ruthless man in Africa. I'd get every white man out who didn't want to help the negro. Don't quote me, or the Portugueses won't allow me back."

He had had a medical view. She was right when she said he spoke in the past tense. He emptied his glass. What he should say was something *real* about his profession and his friends in Africa. Other friends had not lost their way. Not Alejo. "My father once," he said, "before he went on a voyage—sat in a chair and looked at me for half an hour without uttering a word. I went out to play and left him there and he followed me to the window and watched me go down the path. Watching me grow up, I now think. But . . . but most men I've seen dying seem to believe what they think will bring them most comfort." Kamante's

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little black fingers ran lightly down Halliday's jacket and touched his own. Miss Armitage noticed the voice changing. "A doctor should be prepared for eventualities . . . you're not simply a mechanic . . . you're . . ." The fingers clutched. He could not break that grip. Miss Armitage stood up to leave. "The doctor must go where the patient calls," said Halliday. Then noticing what she was about, trying to recover the situation, feeling again that something of his guilt was evident, he said hurriedly, "How hard it is to keep oneself really humane. Of course the only way to reach the African is through his heart. If only the day would come when we could speak from our hearts, as we are, and not as we believe ourselves to be!"

"What kind of day might that be?" The old white lady blinked.

"Surely people of different cultures can be united through a good idea . . . we all know what they need in Africa is willing experiment—but there'll be chaos and war I suppose. Who can prevent it? Who or what?"

"Jesus Christ," said the old lady, blinking again.

"I don't think so," said Halliday. "But you might be right . . . depends on your meaning. Both our emotional and our rational elements have to be as progressive as we'd all like, eh? Forgive me but I think I'm drunk."

"That's all right," said the old lady, and smiled.

"Well," said Halliday, tapping his forehead with his fist. "Whatever you call it we all agree must recognise intrinsic unreasonable human needs which don't have anything to do with scientific proof."

"Yes," said the old lady.

"Look here," said Halliday, "one essential for the right attitude is the principle that what we need for living

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in goodness must come from within and not from religious profession."

"Oh that helps," said the old lady. "Official professions can help." For some reason they were both smiling at each other.

"But not science alone, nor the emotions alone, can manage our lives."

"Agreed," said the old lady, "agreed."

"Too much clamping down of the emotions must make for individual unhappiness and for national calamity . . . if you can only find the right outlet, and the adequate one, the emotions won't destroy the way of reason . . . they'll work for it . . . accept our emotional needs, investigate them for all we're worth, clarify them, and surely we must progress. Then the world won't rest so much on false beliefs in goodness, and on the rejection of what we call bad."

"A good title that—'What we once called bad'."

"We need more than a title now."

"And friends. One needs friends."

"Oh yes. One needs friends." They paused. For a moment Halliday tried again to shut out those concrete African images behind his generalisations.

"It helps to believe in progress, eh?" he said to her slowly. "To believe in the growth of vision—what makes for life and what makes for death. Cynicism is death."

"Yes, it is."

"But after a while so many of us get so tired—and give up."

"Yes."

"And are defeated."

"Yes."

"But you don't seem to have been. I am drunk. Please forgive me."

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“I do,” said the old lady. And smiled again.

Outside in the square the church clock struck eight times. They listened until all the echoes died away. In their mood such a thing bore significance.

“I have felt better since I began to believe in God,” said Miss Armitage.

“You didn’t always?”

“No.” There was a pause. “But you too have such a reverence for life. I could see that in the photographs.”

Halliday said nothing. Back came the images. Suddenly. The end comes suddenly. Toil on. Don’t weaken. The logs scraped through a reed-bed, came out on another jewelled lagoon, scattered the tufted duck. Except for the old one too weary to fly off. This particular jewelled lagoon had an air of sloth: the great white pelicans at the end of the lagoon were all fast asleep. When they awoke they turned their peculiarly shortened bottoms towards him and the negroes and paddled away with slow sleepy strokes. Reproaching all. And in particular *he* who should have known better. And what a pack of irrelevancies had been spoken, or dealt. As you would wish. Spoken to an old lady. And yet also, every word true.

“If I live to be a hundred, as my mother did,” said the old lady, “I feel at last I might put all my pieces together so that they fit. On my hundredth birthday I would like my great grand-children to bring in a cake with a hundred candles on it and I’d blow them all out and sit alone in the darkness that evening able at last to see my life laid out understandably. Wishful and romantic thinking of course. ‘Conditioned’, as I expect you’d say, by your vodka.” She stood up. “I must be off. Shall we shake hands?”

Halliday moved forward to do so.

“I must get you a taxi. How do I do that?”

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“You telephone. But no thank you. I am going to walk. I’m not an American. It will clear my head. I shall walk across the park. I have something to think of.”

“Right.” Halliday lurched forwards to open the door. As he did so he stumbled against the armchair with the large envelope of photographs he had so carefully placed on the arm and knocked the envelope over so that the photographs inside it slid on to the carpet at the old lady’s feet. He hurried to pick them up but the agile old lady was already bending down to do so. As she glanced at the first Halliday heard her let out a gasp of horror. He stopped where he was. Then went back and sat down in his chair. He should have destroyed the pictures. He had wanted to many times. He should never have brought them to England. He recognised with detachment that the bringing was a part of his obsession—a classical symptom at that.

“What a terrifying face,” said the old lady. She too sat down in her chair. But she held firmly on to the photograph.

Halliday surveyed her with what he hoped was professional calm—to some extent it was. “They live in the swamps,” he said.

“How dreadful. I’ve never seen anything like this before.” The old lady held up the photograph vaguely towards him as if she thought *he* had never seen it before.

“It’s a typical face,” said Halliday dryly. “As you see, the skin is quite hairless. It is dry to the touch, it is smooth, it is glossy and it is pallid. They generally have no teeth, or perhaps just a few. Very high and wide cheek-bones but the lower half of the face is narrow. The eye-sockets are protruding but the nasal bridge has sunk, forming a ‘saddle-back’ nose. As you can see also, the eyes slant

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upwards like a mongolian idiot's. The lips are very thick—the top one always protrudes. The saddest fact about them if you are not used to such things is the glandular excretions they exhale through their mouths—it is very hard to get used to—they convey an indescribable odour of decay."

"It must be a dreadful complaint."

"It *is* dreadful."

"What causes it?" He did not answer. "What causes the complaint?"

"I'd rather not talk about it any more," he said. "I'd just . . . rather not . . ."

After a pause the old lady began to gather up the rest of the photographs and put them neatly away in the envelope. Halliday sat quite still. Not smoking, not drinking. The old lady could not prevent herself glancing at the poor tormented faces. And yet some were smiling. Amidst them too were negro faces that looked to be normal—but these faces seemed to be particularly servile. The last photograph she looked at was that of a young girl—perhaps sixteen years old—but somehow she was different. In fact the look in *her* eyes was confiding and affectionate. Miss Armitage thought her photograph must have been placed in this envelope by mistake. "But this is an enchanting young face," she said, holding up the photograph for Halliday to see. He did not look. "Almost beautiful and so trusting."

"Yes," he said. "Kamante."

"A lovely name."

As the old lady glanced at him to see if he agreed she saw that there were tears in his eyes.

"She's dead," he said. "Kamante. Could you go now? I feel so tired."

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"Of course," said the old lady staring at him. "Of course." And hurriedly got up.

Halliday slumped in his chair. He had made a movement to get up and escort Miss Armitage to the door but she had waved him back. "Sit down, Doctor Halliday," she had said. She had long been gone. He took out the bottle of pills from his jacket pocket and swallowed four of them. He started thinking of Alejo. He realised that if he had simply given a description of the old doctor's life and work to Miss Armitage the story would have revealed entirely what he had wished to convey in honour of his profession. The thought of Alejo was a friendly hand on his shoulders. He would have liked the door to open and Alejo to come into the room and sit down beside him.

What had he been talking about?

A wind began to blow into the square from the North and as it murmured from one house wall to another it echoed in the square like the sea. For a while the wind cheered him and he was possessed by physical images of the wind and of the sea, but though he had every desire that they should not do so these images faded. Some of the images had been very beautiful. He brushed his eyes with the back of his hand.

The trouble was that the cold clean seas of the North kept turning into the tepid marsh water. And even as he had watched the images, he had remained conscious, as always now, that he was by himself, and that no matter how beautiful images are, or how terrifying they are, you can but watch them alone; that they are private and incommunicable. You can describe them later to someone somewhere perhaps—but that is all.

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He had been conscious enough at one point to be able to think that he was perfectly able to understand for the first time what it must actually *feel* like to be mad. However, he had no thoughts at all of ever being able to use this new-found knowledge as a doctor.

There was a knock on the door, and Mrs. Joyce came in carrying his supper on a tray. "I've brought your supper, sir."

"I'd forgotten you," said Halliday. "I'd forgotten *you*, Mrs. Joyce."

"I thought you'd like to be eating in here and not in the dining-room. I'll pull over the small table."

How reassuring her voice was: he wanted to get up and touch her. "I don't think I can eat."

"Try."

"I'm a doctor," he said mockingly again. But of her or of himself, he didn't know. She looked concerned. "What's that got to do with it? Here, it's a good steak."

She placed the tray on the small table she had pulled over beside Halliday's chair and waited. Halliday stared at her. She was rapidly developing into a symbolic figure. Whether this was true or not she was not disconcerted by his stare. "Go on," she said. Halliday smiled. He was finding it increasingly difficult to contain his affection. "Go on." He took a mouthful of the steak. It was a pleasanter sensation than he had expected: he had expected to be sick. Perhaps he would be in a moment. "Go on," said the Irishwoman. And he did. He felt he was truly obliging her. She sat there, light, but solid and substantial, silently and patiently waiting for him to finish the whole meal. He particularly enjoyed the apple. He had quite forgotten how good an English apple could taste.

"Thank you very much."

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She nodded and got up.

“Like a nightcap with me?”

“No.”

“You musn’t let me drink alone. They say excessive indulgence causes flabbiness of will, but a hundred years ago the strongest characters were always drunk.”

“Were they?”

“A gentleman didn’t respect himself if he wasn’t carried to bed in his boots.”

“I’m not for carrying you to bed in your boots.”

Halliday laughed. Already the meal seemed to have affected him for the better—and the sleeping pills were beginning to work.

“It’d take a strong man to carry you to bed in your boots.”

Halliday laughed again. He was definitely beginning to feel sleepy. Perhaps he should have taken an even larger dose to compensate for his size. But with that expression on his face that Syani called ‘his provocative air’ he suddenly demanded: “What sort of a man is that father of your child?”

“What’s it to you?” said Mrs. Joyce after a pause; she had been disconcerted this time—and looked shy.

“What sort of a man?”

“He had lots to say.”

“Handsome?”

“He was to me. But he was real mad.”

“How’d you mean?”

“He never knew what he wanted. Always changing his mind. Always lying to you but not knowing it at the time. He meant it when he said it.” For a moment Mrs. Joyce looked curiously innocent, and seemed to be remembering something intimate. Her face softened. Then she looked

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at Halliday, and in her assured feminine way said, "You still look pale."

"The old lady said that."

"She was right then."

"It would be surprising if I didn't. It's the unconscious mind that has produced the pallor."

"What?"

"The unconscious mind produces the illness, taking advantage of some hereditary weakness to get the patient out of a mentally distressing situation, to help him escape an ordeal or evade an exacting experience."

"Still, you seem happier tonight."

"Yes. I am now. You've cheered me up."

"Have I? You'll be better after a sleep."

"Yes. Where did you go to school?"

"A convent school. I won a scholarship. But I ran away from it. I didn't like it."

"Are you a Catholic?"

"Not now. I still believe in Hell though." She laughed. "I thought the Nuns were silly."

"All of them?"

"All I knew."

"You must have been very pretty when you were young."

"Aren't I now?"

It was Halliday's turn to laugh. "Of course. I didn't mean that."

"I think I look better now than I ever did."

"Were you young when you had the baby?"

"No. I'm thirty-five now. I knew my way about then. That was in Dublin. He wasn't the first or the last."

"No?"

"I'm always falling in love," she said simply and laughed again, but this time at herself.

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"Did you never want to get married?" asked Halliday.

"Oh yes, sometimes. I don't worry about it though."

"I hope you'll stay with me."

"Why ever not," she said. "You are strange." Then: "I don't mind you asking me things," she said.

They were silent. They were together on some journey, he and Mrs. Joyce. He had, after all, just eaten a meal in a strange city. It was curious that she did not insist that they leave the house now, hail a taxi, and proceed.

"What's it really like?"

"What?"

"Africa."

"Don't think of it as a place. It's many places. It's a shape—a shape filled with longing. Of course . . . when you come to think of it . . . its shape is almost that of the human heart."

"So it is." Mrs. Joyce looked pleased with the image.

"The unconscious mind is often very sentimental," said Halliday dryly. "Africa's not sentimental." Then he asked, not dryly at all, "Have you ever seen a firefly?"

"Oh no."

"In parts of Africa in the highlands when the long rains are over, in central Angola for instance where the Ovimbundu now live, early in the month of June when the nights are almost as cold as in England now, you see them in the forests. They float through the clear dusk. They seem to be curtseying. Generally they keep a constant height, four or five feet from the ground, so that you might think they were a crowd of children, holding up candles, running through the darkness, waving their hands with joy."

"Dumb children," said Mrs. Joyce.

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“That’s right.”

“Ah.” Then: “Have you ever had any children?” she asked.

“No.”

“Wouldn’t you have liked to?”

“Yes.”

“You should have had, you know. You’re just the sort of man who . . .”

They were silent for perhaps ten minutes. Halliday’s head began to fall towards his chest. He was such a massive figure that it looked as if it would be impossible for him ever to rise out of that chair.

“Look, sir,” said Mrs. Joyce. “Before you go off I think you ought to walk over to your bed. You’ll be better in the morning.”

“Yes,” said Halliday. “Bed. Give me your hand.”

“My hand?”

Mrs. Joyce got up and walked over to his chair. She put out both her hands towards him. Halliday took her hands in his own and stood up, pulling on her hands as he did so. He held on to her hands. He stood looking down at her.

He heard her draw her breath in sharply. Then she let go of his hands, drew his head down and kissed him. He pulled her against him so that her cheek was pressed against his and he was looking over her shoulder. He put his cheek against her hair. He pulled her closer.

They stood while Halliday tried to make up his mind. He was very, very tired. Then he realised he didn’t have the energy to be able to go on. And he had begun to consider.

And Mrs. Joyce, either sensing this or for other reasons entirely her own, broke away from him, and went to the

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door of the room. She looked back gently at him, smiled, said "You're very handsome" and went out quietly closing the door behind her.

He stood thinking about her. He was very grateful to her. He was happy. He had been reassured. He stood still for a while, then slowly started to walk off to his bedroom alone. He was very grateful to Mrs. Joyce: she seemed to understand.

Next morning when he woke up in bed he was better and thought of Mrs. Joyce. Although he could tell from that flutter of his heart that his sleep had been a drugged one, he felt incredibly rested. He glanced at his watch—he had forgotten to wind it: it had stopped. But he was sure that it had been broad daylight for some time.

It was the first dreamless sleep he had had for weeks. He had been foolish not to have drugged himself before and the reasons he had had for not doing so seemed this morning to be peculiarly naïve; but he had never been able to reason when he was exhausted. Mrs. Joyce: he smiled. A surprising woman.

He would receive his knighthood and go back. He would catch a plane from the airport on Sunday. Alejo was too old to run the hospital. Alejo would be missing him intensely. However, since he was here he might as well receive the accolade—it would be publicity for the hospital. He felt humorous and alive again. Perhaps because of a woman's kiss.

He got out of bed. The house was quiet. The world was quiet. He was in a city. He had expected to have been surrounded by noise.

The light streaming under the curtains was white and

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gentle. He wondered if he would ever get used again to the softness of the English light. He went over to the window to draw the curtains. Outside everything was covered in snow. It lay thick upon the window-sill, on the road, on the park, on all the buildings. It lay as far as he could see. It had smoothed and rounded the contours. The city was a soft glowing white as if it had just been born; the white children running excitedly in the park looked like the first generation.

A group of men appeared, following a lorry down the park road, shovelling gravel and dirt behind them as they went. The white road was spoiled. But as they passed slowly by the entrance into the square the snow began to fall again covering the gravel and their tracks. Faster and faster it fell, thicker and thicker, and swept by the rising wind it seemed to be trying to fly from something, as he had been himself. The group of shovellers in the road shouted out, shrugged their shoulders, hoisted their shovels, jumped into the back of their lorry, drove off. It was beautiful and unbelievable. It also was reassuring. There was something feminine about the snow.

Halliday muttered with pleasure. He felt secure; the long sleep and the falling snow had covered up his wounds. Like the road. Like the road, he was resting in the falling snow. He raised a hand and touched his cheek.

Mrs. Joyce knocked on the bathroom door: "Just to tell you your car's here, sir." He smiled at her voice.

"Thank you. Ask him to wait. How are you this morning?"

"I'm fine. How are you?"

"Fine too."

"I thought it best not to be waking you. And what would you like for your breakfast?"

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“Ham and eggs.”

“I’ve only got the bacon.”

“Bacon and eggs then.”

“And toast?”

“And toast and coffee.”

Halliday finished his bath in comfort and in peace and went back to his bedroom to dress. He put on two new vests he had bought in Lisbon and the new red pull-over. There was a knock on the bedroom door.

“Come in.”

“Your breakfast is ready in the dining-room.”

“Thank you.”

He saw with pleasure that Mrs. Joyce was just as natural today as she had seemed the evening before, not demanding anything but apparently prepared to give.

“I’ll be out for lunch. But I’ll have an early night.”

“It suits you.”

“Any letters?”

“No. But you’ll be remembering Mr. and Mrs. Matthews will be round this evening.”

“Oh yes.” .

“Your picture’s in all the papers.” She smiled at him.

“You look better.”

He enjoyed his breakfast.

He pulled up the collar of his overcoat, took a deep breath, opened the door of his house to make his way to the car in the square. It had stopped snowing. The first thing was to look up at the sky. It was freezing cold, the snow was hardening fast, but the sun was shining. He was able to look straight at it. It was now almost noon, the sun a pale yellow. It was pretty in the little square with the snow overhanging all the houses.

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He told himself he hadn't smelt such air for a life-time, breathed deeper and deeper. Inevitably the fat chauffeur was beaming, holding open the car door.

"Good morning, Doctor. You look well today."

"Good morning to you."

When they had seated themselves the chauffeur slid back the glass panel that separated them and asked: "Where to, sir?"

"Moss Brothers."

"Yes, sir. Good picture of you in the *Express*, sir." Halliday was handed the paper.

The car moved off. Halliday looked out of the back window at the snow-covered church. He glanced at his watch. After breakfast he had wound it up and corrected it, and sure enough as they left the square the church clock struck noon. But the tolling was quieter this morning, as if the bells too were muffled by the snow.

As they drove he looked out of the car windows much more serenely than he had the day before. He wondered how the cockney soldiers felt when they returned to London after the war. Those who had been in the East, in the Japanese prison camps. But it would have been autumn then and the thin, thin trees of winter now so delicately laced with snow, a rusty brown. Some of the buildings would have been ruins—not so large and square. The people would have been shabbier, more tired—not quite so many of them. Of course in a sense he had himself returned from a war—was on leave from it—'compassionate leave!'

Sitting up so straight in the back of the car, surveying the realm as it were, he looked very prosperous this morning, and as if he were thinking of buying the park! They came out of the park, crossed over the lights, drove round

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a crescent of shabbily painted Nash houses and, halfway, turned left into Portland Place.

“Good God,” said Halliday as they passed Broadcasting House, “I always thought of that place as the biggest building in London, but it’s minute in comparison to half these blocks of offices and that extension going up behind is going to dwarf it!”

“That’s B.B.C. too,” said the chauffeur gloomily. “They say there’s no studios in it. Just offices. My boy works there. Bureaucracy, that’s what it is, sir. London’s filling up with offices. You should be at one of the stations when they all pile in in the mornings. Like Dante’s Inferno one of the papers said. It’s horrible. Oh, you won’t recognise half of London, sir—not being away so long. It’s a shame. It was so much better as it was. A city full of offices! No homeliness to it now.”

And it *was* changed—this city.

They drove down Regent Street, passed the ‘January Sales’, rounded Piccadilly Circus underneath the new Coca-Cola sign, went down the Haymarket, turned left through Trafalgar-Square and entered the side streets.

The car stopped. “I thought you would like to go down the thoroughfare, sir,” said the chauffeur mournfully. When he opened the door for Halliday to get out he said confidentially: “I hear the next thing they’re going to pull down is the Golders Green Hippodrome. Another block of offices. They’re all jumping on to that band-waggon. Sooner or later somebody’s going to feel the draught!”

“You should watch your weight.”

“Should I, sir?” The chauffeur was startled.

“You should.”

As Halliday got out of the car the chauffeur called anxiously after him:

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“Am I too fat?”

“You are.”

“My wife likes me fat.”

“It’s not your wife I’m concerned about. Just you eat less.”

“I’ll take your word for it, sir.”

“Good.”

“And your advice.”

In Moss Brothers they were delighted to receive him. At first they had difficulty in finding a coat large enough to fit him for the ceremony but in the end were successful. He surveyed himself in the mirror, was reassured by everyone.

He came out of the shop and stood looking. The public houses were open. The fruit men were singing and whistling and shouting out cheerful insults at the private motorists as they tried to find a parking place or make their way up the jammed streets. Two pretty girls, their faces flushed, huge scarves wound round their necks, hurried past, laughing. Halliday recognised the scarves: they were medical students from Charing Cross. And two men carried a television set—which he had never seen. And a Chelsea Pensioner came up the street. A fine old man. Upright, barely using his stick. By a trick of the light as he stepped out into the sun his uniform glowed crimson so that he looked for a moment a pantomime figure, an ancestral figure, specially sent to redeem and light up the city.

Crimson. Twenty-seven years ago Halliday had stood one night on a flat roof-top after a students’ party he had taken Frances Irving to in the King’s road. A crimson glow above London had seemed to be a reflection of all distressed souls and all bodies in pain and a reflection of

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his own adolescent distress. Alone in the dark he had cried out in sympathy at human suffering, and had sworn to do all he could to relieve it. Suddenly this morning, rested and well, touched by his thoughts of his housekeeper, enchanted by his surroundings, he was filled with joy—and resolved to continue—whatever.

He pictured himself walking back into the ward, the ward where *his* negroes—the swamp negroes—were lying. He pictured them smiling as they sensed that he was hopeful again, and sympathetic, and that they were loved. Most of all that they were loved. Kamante would not be there: he would have to forgive himself that—not forget but forgive. It was necessary to do so.

“You’ve been standing there a long time,” said a voice beside him. “D’you want to come with me?” It was a middle-aged lady in a fawn coat. Halliday looked down at her. “Oh, no.” He started to walk away, then turned back and said gently: “Thank you very much all the same.”

“Some other time?”

“That’s it.”

He walked towards the car. He would go back to Regent’s Park and re-read his notes on the swamp negroes. He knew now why he had brought the notes. In his heart he must have been hoping all along for such a mood as he found himself to be in; for such a return of purpose. “We must prefer facts to opinions, gentlemen,” as old Lehmann used to say at the beginning of every other lecture. “We must maintain our standards in note-taking and in critical commentary.” He would re-read his notes.

“Home,” he said to the chauffeur. The black car moved off.

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He would review every opinion he had had. He would go over first principles. He would consult some of his colleagues in London. He would catch a plane to Luanda as soon as it could be arranged. Yes, if he couldn't succeed in curing them himself he would do his best to ensure that someone else would.

The black car turned sharp right, down past the back of the Cambridge Theatre. "Miss the traffic this way, sir," said the chauffeur smugly.

It was darker in this narrow street. Halliday felt his heart beating with a normal steady thump. The night on the hillside, the days in their ward and the time in the marshes could now be thought about clinically for the first time for months. Like the city he was re-born—yet there was no tangible reason for it. Perhaps there never was for such a profound change of mood. Perhaps once again it was the unconscious mind at work, or simply the sun and the snow.

The car emerged from the side-streets and crossed the road by the roundabout in front of the Prince's Theatre. Yes, everything seemed possible. He would take back with him someone like himself when he had first gone to Africa. There must be several in London seeking adventure, tired of the city and tired of the system. Tired of waiting to step into dead men's shoes. He would find someone to go back to the marshes also. And perhaps go with him.

They proceeded on their way. They passed the square Halliday had lived in in his student days—he gave it the briefest glance. By the time the black car, which some people always described as 'a hearse', was entering Regent's Park he was on the march. Once again resolved to live in touch with the realities of men and of the earth as he had sworn after that row with Frances on the roof-top

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in the King's Road. Resolved to stay sensitive to all complaints though he heard them fifty times a day—to accept all dangers without callousness and without sentimentality. He had quite forgotten his resolve, the previous evening, to live for what pleasures he could make real. Sitting there in the car, like the car, he was moving, convinced he was again in possession of the most God-like power possible to man—Christian or not—the power to heal.

A scarecrow, dressed in the rags of his conscience, had slipped on to the floor by his feet. He regarded this scarecrow with equanimity. He did not expect to see it substantial again.

They entered the square.

"Thank you," said Halliday. "I may need you tomorrow—I hope to visit some friends. But I shall be leaving England shortly."

"Very good, sir."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye, sir. I'll take your advice."

"Oh yes. I'll draw you up a diet. We'll have a talk tomorrow. I expect your doctor's a busy man."

"Thank you, sir."

Halliday went into the house. He greeted Mrs. Joyce with enormous affection but no desire. He felt he had known her for many years. He couldn't stop smiling at her. He was grateful to Mrs. Joyce. Terribly grateful. And there was something about this woman that made him even more confident. It was the way she looked at him rather than anything she had said.

"Have you eaten then?"

"Not yet. Where is this study?"

"In the top of the house."

"Could you make me a sandwich and a pot of tea?"

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“You should be having a proper meal.”

“I will tonight with the Matthews.”

Halliday hurried up to his bedroom for his brief-case. Then went up another flight of stairs to find the study. He took out his notes on the swamp negroes and began to read.

Mrs. Joyce had to knock a third time before he heard her. “Here’s your sandwiches. And here’s the afternoon post.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t be letting your tea get cold.”

But it did get cold. He read his notes, and thought. He noticed the letters; there were several. He saw there was a letter from Alejo. He opened it quickly. The letter read:

My dear Benjamin,

It is New Year’s Eve. You have been gone two weeks today and to me it seems a great deal longer.

We have suffered a period of intense heat.

I must admit to feeling very tired. I expect it is the heat. And I do miss you.

Tonight I have just come back from the ward where your negroes are. They are restless. Perhaps they too are affected by this incredible heat. Those who sleep have a strange look on their faces as if they are dreaming badly. How strange too that we always refer to them simply as *your* negroes.

I think of you in your own land and in London. I am sure you will return to us refreshed. This is my hope and my prayer.

Ben, you cannot go wrong. Your work stands behind you like an angel and protects you. Your work. Don’t be proud. When you have finished your holiday please come back and *do what you can*. It is *here* you will find the real rewards.

I have been talking to young Bennett a great deal since you left: I think perhaps he has come out to us too

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soon. Perhaps you also were too young when you came out here—I have wondered so. Here you can learn much but, not without maturity, for the land is an overpowering land, and there are so many different things speaking at once—and from all sides.

I do hope you are having a good rest, Benjamin. Don't brood over your mistakes. There is no alternative to optimism, as once I heard you say.

I feel sad this evening but cannot tell why. I think I envy you in your capital city. I tell myself there is snow there. I too would wish to be in my own country—and in Lisbon—and on this night of all nights in the year. Yes, I am tired.

I long to go to the midnight Mass.

In Lisbon I would walk out in the streets at eleven o'clock. Which it is now—though the time is different. Time!

I think of those streets—and those sharp hills shadowed and streaked so black and so white by the full moon. I think of the moon standing high, outshining all, so that only here and there would glimmer some huge and solitary star.

The tops of the walls are white, the leaves of the olives are black. They are traced out of the sky. But the houses are not dark, the wooden shutters are open, men are gazing into the night.

I pass under a clock tower and linger to hear the youths talk. In the cafés they are singing *fados*. I hear the clogs tapping as the men and the women join me in my walk to the church. It is now that the clocks strike the last quarter before midnight. We kneel in the church.

The clock strikes midnight.

And then we hear the Christian singing!

A Happy New Year, Benjamin. I am too tired to write longer. Return to us.

I have loved you. I always will. Wherever.

Alejo

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Halliday put down the letter; he gazed in front of him, picturing the writer. He felt such affection. There *were* old men who could grow old gracefully. There *were* wonderful old men. He saw Alejo's face when he returned and walked into his room in Katopos without warning. 'Old men ought to be explorers.' He saw themselves together and silent—understanding what was now unnecessary to speak of. Oh, certainly sometimes one could speak of the wisdom of old men. He must consult the specialists who might help, and leave. He must phone the airport and go home by plane.

There was a shaving mirror on the desk and he saw his face in it. He noticed the bruise on his forehead where he had been banging himself with his fist the evening before. He turned the mirror face down: no more of that!

He picked up the next letter. It was very brief.

62 Abbey Road,
St. John's Wood, N.W.8.

15.1.59

Dear Doctor Halliday,

You said you liked old ladies. Good!

As I walked home I found myself very affected by yourself and what you told me. You really must have a rest. I enclose some money for you. I hope you will spend some of it on *yourself*. I mean you to.

My husband left me more than comfortably off when he died. My children and grandchildren are well provided for. Also I have an income from my journalism and my novels.

So therefore please accept this gift, to do with entirely as you please.

Yours sincerely,
Helena Armitage

Inside the envelope was a cheque for five hundred pounds.

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Halliday blinked and shook his head. It was very kind of the old lady. It must be a lot of money to her—whatever she might say. How generous people could be! He must phone her up. Or write to her now. Yes, now. He rubbed his eyes.

Outside in the square the church clock struck again. From higher in the house than he had heard it before its tone seemed to be thinner. He was having a good day.

“Oh, incomprehensible God,” he said aloud and without cynicism or irony. In gratitude, and in luck, he nodded his head again. “Fear no more the heat of the sun,” he said. He picked up the rest of the letters—invitations—congratulations on his knighthood—offers of posts—letters beseeching help; more money for the hospital; cheques made out to Sir Benjamin Halliday. Then almost at the bottom a thin airmail letter in Nurse Kala’s handwriting. The post-mark Luanda; the negro’s face grinning at him from the stamp in the top right-hand corner.

The letter read:

January 3rd

Dear Doctor Benjamin,

Doctor Bennett has asked me that I write. He is operating. Doctor Bennett tells me to say he is very surprised if Doctor Alejo lives through the night. It is now 2 a.m. I thought Doctor Alejo would die last night but he has struggled through today with respirations of about 7 breaths a minute and his lungs filling up fast. Most of the other nurses are outside waiting. Doctor Salamar has dysentery and is on his couch. It is very hot. Doctor Bennett told me he will be back at 3 a.m. It is strange because Doctor Alejo he is dying so slowly.

I do not write more. Doctor Alejo said yesterday he loved you very much. We here, the doctors and the nurses all send our love.

Nurse Kala

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Tomorrow

Doctor Alejo has just died. Doctor Bennett will write when he can. We send you our love.

Halliday dropped the letter. It seemed to fall so noisily on to the wooden floor. His lips had dried. There was a pain over his heart. He sat for a long while staring out of the window in front of him. It was a round window. Slowly the world outside spun like the window. His head spun as if he had been hit. He was ice cold. He saw Alejo walking across the compound. He heard Alejo speaking to a patient. He saw Alejo kneeling in prayer. He heard Alejo laugh.

Alejo was old. He knew that. He had known it. Alejo couldn't be expected to live for ever. But not to see the man again! Not ever. Halliday's eyes filled with tears.

He saw that man. In so many ways. Images. Images of life. Images of a dead man that would last perhaps twenty years in the world, and then would fade without a whisper. At one last unexpected memory he shook uncontrollably and sobbed. He leaned forward and buried his face in his arms. Alejo must have died thinking that he . . . but it was for people like Alejo that he had ever . . . had ever . . . If only he could have seen him once—have been there. Just once again.

The sobbing lessened. He sat up. What was the point now?

Halliday's body grew rigid. All his emotions that day had been false—his optimism shallow and bodiless. Unlike Alejo he was a man who had failed in his profession. Failed at what he had known and done best. In fact he had committed a crime. He had killed a patient. If he could use the word, he had 'sinned' against his profession, and against himself. Against life.

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A doctor who had killed a patient not by accident or by ignorance but by lack of sympathy. A doctor who had *rejected* a human life. And now too his last friend and his teacher was gone. He was at last, and finally, utterly alone.

Halliday reached down to pick up Nurse Kala's letter to read her words for the last time.

Tomorrow

Doctor Alejo has just died. Doctor Bennett will write when he can. We send you our love.

Love. Human love. Again his eyes filled with tears. Then he noticed a couple of sentences scrawled at the side of the letter—hurriedly written sentences: 'Doctor Bennett has just come into the room. He says to tell you that when your negroes hear that Doctor Alejo dies they leave our hospital and tell him that they are going back to Manda.'

Halliday stood up. So that was that. It was all so irreversibly ended. The rejection, like the loneliness, was complete. There were no more forces from that world he had left behind in Africa to drive him forward ever again. He was now, simply, on loan. A childless, godless, defeated man with no ties whatever. And that anyone anywhere had ever needed or wanted him was as insubstantial as some half-remembered dream. There was nothing to go back to Africa for, nothing at all.

He buttoned up his overcoat. He was not proceeding anywhere out of the least conviction or desire. Simply that there was no alternative to movement but death. To die like them all: Alejo; Kamante; his father; his mother; the diseased negroes in the swamp. Whatever was about to be lived would in its turn demand inspection. But could not

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be inspected, could not be analysed, before it was lived. Probably he would never be able to look back on it as living at all. Would not need to. What was to come would be a mere lingering. All his issues had been resolved. To continue was pointless. If he had the necessary energy he would end his life now. If only the sea would flood in and drown him where he stood.

‘John Halliday, lost at sea,

In the neighbourhood of Iceland . . .’

Yes, he was like his melancholic father, waiting to drown.

He found himself descending the stairs of the house. He would have to give up this house. He would never be able to afford such a house on his own. He would spend the old lady’s money on himself of course. As he crossed the road to enter Regent’s Park he was surprised to find himself still heedful of the traffic. It was almost dark. It was raining on the snow. Somehow he wanted to compose himself before his friends came to dinner. Friends? Acquaintances. Why should he bother? Why *was* he bothering? He didn’t know.

When he reached the artificial lake and saw the tame ducks paddling about so solemnly and so safely upon the water he began to laugh hysterically.

PART TWO



◆ I ◆

ON the night of July the ninth, nineteen hundred and fifty-eight, Halliday was fast asleep in the middle of Africa. More or less in the middle—somewhere in the upper reaches of the River Cuilo. Perhaps in Angola, perhaps in the Congo. In this region every valley is a swamp.

Halliday was lost but not seriously so; he had a compass and a waterproof map in his pocket. Besides, the negroes with him, Abraham and Isaac, father and son, professed to know the way back. He had been away from the hospital at Katopos for three weeks: for a change; to look for a medicinal herb which he had heard grew common in this region; and because he'd never been North West of the Malange province and had wanted to for a long time. He didn't know any white men who had been. It had seemed time he went exploring. He was having a holiday and a deserved one.

July the ninth, nineteen hundred and fifty-eight. He was forty-seven years old. He would have said of himself that he was in the prime of life. A vigorous, purposeful, romantic man—strong as a horse.

From the moment they had descended into it Abraham and Isaac had disliked this region. They wanted to climb back from it and get home to their wives. But Halliday had driven them on. He was most anxious to find the herb so that he could analyse it: to progress, to add to the knowledge of tropical diseases he had already obtained.

They had not seen anyone else for two weeks. No wonder—it was a sick land, he knew that. Maybe one day this sick land would get well. He had lain awake imagining

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what it might be. A land lived in and farmed by its own people: the jungle cut back, the swamps drained, the disease-carriers destroyed. He was optimistic for this and all such lands. He was an optimist—and a humane one. However, for the present it was overcrowded and it rotted. There was a continuous and intense convulsion. The multitudinous plants embraced, fought, writhed towards the sun.

The moon shone. Once, his sleep was interrupted by a half-conscious thought that something was wrong.

He woke up. There was a strange smell and a hissing sound. The fire was going out and smoking. He sat up peering at the fire. A cloud of white smoke was hissing from the ashes. He shook his head. He must have been in a deep sleep not to have woken before.

What had happened to the fire? And where had the men gone? He heard the cry of a hyena. Where in the hell were his men?

The fire went on hissing. There was a movement at the edge of the clearing. "Abraham," said Halliday, but in case it wasn't Abraham or his son Isaac but the hyena he picked up his rifle. It will be a pleasure to kill something for a change, he thought, smiling. I've never liked hyenas. I'm not a religious man—though I suppose Alejo would go to Hell to dispute that. He raised the rifle.

It *was* a man that came into the clearing. A broader figure than Abraham or Isaac—a squat figure. Halliday put down his rifle.

The negro walked slowly towards the fire, moaning, stopped a pace away from it, then abruptly tipped the water he was carrying in the loin-cloth in front of him over the hot ashes, and jumped back. The fire went out.

Halliday sat there astonished. Did the man think the

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fire would start some forest blaze? Not in this tropical region! Was he frightened of the fire? Was there in the act some archaic, some religious significance? Halliday looked at this strange squat moaning figure: the man was mad.

Halliday spoke. The negro stopped moaning, carefully circled the smoking ashes and came over towards Halliday. As he moved up the slope he too began to speak. He held his hands low in front of him. Halliday sat on his blanket, speaking reassuringly in the language of the Vaseline. Halliday was fit, strong and unafraid. The negro came on up the slope. As if keeping pace with him a cloud crossed the moon so that the little clearing was shadowed. The negro reached Halliday, put out his hands towards Halliday's throat. As Halliday was about to resist, the cloud passed the moon and the light shone down again on Halliday's upturned face. The negro cried out in astonishment, jumped back down the slope.

Halliday spoke again. They watched each other. A series of conflicting expressions passed over the negro's face. Slowly he climbed up the slope again, put a hand out, touched Halliday's cheek and his red hair. He seemed to be making up his mind to a momentous decision, to the most momentous decision of his life. As if he had had a vision—a vision somehow inspired by the nature of the man seated on the ground before him. It was as if he had had an imaginative idea, and an idea of showing Halliday something. Yes, it seemed to Halliday that somewhere in the negro's brain had permeated the idea that the huge white man might help. But help who or what? He could not conceivably have known Halliday was a doctor.

Halliday went on talking, trying to reassure the negro. Although every now and again an expression of doubt or of fear passed over the negro's face, although he could not

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have understood Halliday, he seemed to be gaining confidence as he listened. He seemed to be gauging Halliday's character. He stared at Halliday's face, and not only at his face but at his body, as if—as if he had never seen such a *healthy* man before. He also stared at Halliday's clothes. He touched Halliday's clothes. He touched the strap of the leather satchel Halliday was wearing round his neck.

Then he spoke. The phrase had a note of entreaty in it. For some reason Halliday found himself nodding his head. The phrase was repeated. Halliday nodded his head. The negro certainly wanted something of him, but what? For the third time Halliday nodded his head.

With an abrupt and prodigious movement the negro knelt down, stuck his right shoulder into Halliday's stomach, and stood up swinging Halliday dizzily and unbelievably through the air so that he found himself hanging head downwards with his face bumping against the back of the negro's naked legs. Then the negro turned round on the slope, and started to run down it and across the clearing into the swamp.

They had proceeded several yards into the swamp before Halliday had recovered sufficiently to take action. The blood had gone to his head. He slapped his hands against the back of the negro's legs. The negro kept hurrying on, patting and groaning with the enormous effort. Halliday started to laugh. Then, thinking this ridiculous incident had gone far enough he wrapped his arms round the negro's legs so that they both fell into the swamp.

Halliday got up rubbing the mud and water out of his eyes and his hair. And all this time the negro stared at Halliday with such curiosity that Halliday realised he had

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never seen a white man before. Not that this was surprising. The man's face was brutal and flattened. It had something servile about it. Halliday had the impression that if only he could give a decisive and understood order the negro would obey. He did so: "Get up," he said. And gestured with his hand: the negro got up.

They could not have gone far into the swamp but already were surrounded. Surrounded by an astonishing succulent greenness. A black green. Silver in the moonlight. The air steaming up into their mouths was a green mist. It was hotter in the swamp than in the clearing. There were big flies—stabbing flies. Halliday put his hand in his satchel, took out a phial, and swallowed a couple of paludrin tablets.

The negro spoke slowly and clearly, and pointed the way. The way looked impossible. Halliday wished he had understood what the negro had said; it had been a speech. Perhaps like the Chinese his language was such that it needed many words to make a statement. Or perhaps he was a man who said everything twice! Halliday was beginning to find the situation comic. But he did not propose to go on with the negro. He had no idea what the negro was about or where he had come from.

"Man Friday!" Halliday laughed. He looked at the squat figure standing in the moonlight—open mouthed, still scraping the mud out of his long crinkly hair—and he said in English: "Hello, old Friday. Hello, Black Friday."

Evidently the negro too was amused, for he also began to laugh. They laughed together. And it was in the middle of this fit of companionable laughter that Halliday noticed a peculiar detail: the loin cloth the negro wore was shaped like an apron.

Something had been established between them. To

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Halliday the negro's face did not now seem as brutal as he had first thought it. It seemed a loyal face. Was this a man who served?

Again Friday pointed. Halliday shook his head. He knew he must get back to the clearing to try and find his men. That was the place to wait for them. They would not have left him for long. Besides, he wanted his rifle and his pack.

The negro made a movement towards Halliday as if once more he would pick Halliday up and carry him on through the swamp, but then, apparently having remembered an essential, he paused, lay down in the swamp, and doused himself with water. He got up and indicated he was willing and anxious to resume his burden. "No thank you, Friday," said Halliday.

The negro hesitated, made up his mind, then moved forward as menacingly as he had before on the slope. Halliday let him come on, but this time as the hands came up towards his throat, Halliday stepped to one side, and hit the negro in the face with his fist. The negro was knocked sideways into the swamp. He stood up, moaning, rubbing his jaw, advanced towards Halliday again to renew the encounter. Halliday hit him in the stomach; the negro fell down and began to be sick. Halliday felt sorry for him but he didn't see what else he could have done.

After a while the negro got up for the third time, tried again.

"All right, Friday," said Halliday. "I'll come with you."

He didn't want to kill Friday; Abraham and Isaac could certainly take care of themselves; and most of all he had become curious. So he started to walk in the direction Friday had pointed out. Friday staggered after him.

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Halliday gave him an arm for support and together they began to go deeper into the swamp. As soon as they had covered a few yards Halliday doubted the wisdom of his decision, but somehow or other he felt himself to be committed. Another thirty yards and he had realised that in any case he could not find his way back to the clearing in the night. Abraham and Isaac would have to look after themselves. But how would he get in touch with them?

They went on. Friday was still mumbling to himself and rubbing his jaw. Halliday put his hand into his hip pocket for the little metal flask of brandy he carried, to comfort Friday, felt that it was gone. Isaac! An expert thief. So that was why they had disappeared in the middle of the night—to drink his brandy. But what would they think when they returned? Well, that was their problem. Tomorrow if he could not find the clearing he would build a large fire and, Indian fashion, send up a cloud of smoke.

Friday had now recovered himself sufficiently to be able to lead. They moved faster through the swamp. Halliday hoped it was too dense and shallow for crocodiles. But what about snakes? Then he realised that he didn't care: he had made up his mind; where Friday led he would follow.

Friday had moved two or three yards ahead. Every so often he would turn round to Halliday and nod reassuringly, nod gratefully; Halliday would courteously nod back.

There were parrots. Too deeply asleep to wake as they passed. There were little birds that did wake and flew briefly off, and blundered drowsily into branches and eaves and rushes—two men passing—some nightmare to be forgotten as soon as possible.

Mangroves, orchids, lilies, flies, mud, water-snakes and

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water: he had not *seen* them before. And all sleeping. He had not known that water slept. The air in the swamp had definitely grown sweeter but was not sickly. He was being drugged. But he felt well. He saw that he and Friday could be born and die here within a mile of each other and never know it.

Friday stopped, lay down in the swamp, and doused himself with water. When he got up he started to move off again, but then turned round and urgently beckoned to Halliday to do the same. Halliday considered him gravely. The negro's face grew more worried, his gestures more vehement.

Halliday lay down in the swamp and covered himself with water. The negro was satisfied. They went on. "I must humour you, Friday," said Halliday. "Always humour madmen as mother used to say." Friday thought he was being thanked; he turned round, he smirked, he nodded his head. Halliday nodded back. At the end of another hundred yards it was Halliday that was the first to lie down in the water; Friday joined him. They splashed each other gravely, got up, and went on.

Now there was silence, a vast silence; around and above—as if they had frightened every inhabitant of the swamp. No more croakings, no slithering, no wings beating, no crying—nothing. Everything stayed where it was except the two men. It was in this silence that Halliday had a presentiment of alien events. He had never felt prophetic in his life before.

"What's up?" said Halliday. "Sh," said Friday; Friday was listening.

Far away Halliday heard the tremor of drums. Like a lament. Gradually swelling. A nostalgic appealing sound. It touched at something fundamental in him. 'He had

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been the last to hear it.' The whole swamp was silent because it had been listening to these drums.

The drums swelled. He supposed the sleeping birds were awake and listening now—had woken and listened while he walked—and it occurred to him that perhaps he too had heard the drums as he walked and had not known it and it was they and their fateful sound that had made him feel prophetic.

Slowly the drums faded. They faded like the funeral bell that was blown out over Stromness harbour to the sea and the ships in the North East wind. Yes, for him the moment of the drums had death in it. But what was it to Friday? Or to the swamp? Halliday peered at Friday's face. Friday looked sad.

The drums finished. Friday began to push his way on, and as Halliday followed his new patient he told himself it had always been one of his characteristics to be romantically affected by the night, and tomorrow he would not think of the drums. There was work to be done—he knew that. But all the same, he couldn't get out of his head the irrational conclusion from his walk and those drums that a whole life could be lived for just such a night as this. It was the sensation of reality that was so remarkable, of being at home in the world—of *living* there. He seemed to be seeing a swamp properly for the first time; a shutter had been removed from his brain.

"Doctor Halliday," he heard himself saying to Friday. "I'm Doctor Benjamin Halliday." Friday nodded as gratefully as before.

"All right, Friday," said Halliday humorously, "I live as you live. I walk as you walk—alone."

In the night sky the wind had begun to blow stronger overhead. Although it did not affect the two men down

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in the swamp, could not have done so, it seemed to draw them on with it. It was as if it too had waited to hear the drums but now must get on. They looked up as they walked. Certain clouds that blew towards the North turned yellow as they disappeared into the dark, into the rushes, the trees and the mangroves.

Tall as he was the rushes now reached over his head. The night trembled with noise. Nothing could sleep after those drums. The croaking of huge resonant frogs, the slithering sounds. And a peacock's cry. Since the swamp was now too tall to see over it he looked down at his feet. They had begun to skirt round pools. Sometimes these pools turned out to be pools of light. The trees reflected from them stood at grotesque angles. It was hard here to distinguish between reflection and reality.

The swamp began to open out. And now there was war in the pools around them; and a fermenting. But somehow Friday managed to keep to the firmest ground: they rarely sank deeper than their knees. The water had become oily; the insects gleamed that ran and walked on this water. Ants had begun to work in the trees. The sweat became like an oil on him. In this oil insects had begun to stay and sting continually. The little spiders on his bare arms were blue, the mosquitoes jet black.

They were approaching a lagoon. When Friday again lay down in the water Halliday felt too tired to be companionable. But Friday insisted. They nodded at each other as before. They began to circle the edge of the lagoon. The moon shone bright. Suddenly Friday stopped, cried out miserably, pointed for Halliday to see. He turned back for a moment, putting his hand on Halliday's arm. He tapped his forehead with such respect as a devout Catholic crosses himself before the altar.

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On the beach was a dead crocodile, its flesh rotting and covered in a mass of carrion black flies. The flies swarmed all over the body, coming and going beneath the hide, and under the hide as they stood watching the buzzing began to echo, so that like the drums the tone was one of lament. The tone grew louder, grew rounder. Unable to bear it the negro cried out again, lamenting like the drums, like the flies, and ran off. Halliday hurried after him shouting what comfort he could in a mixture of Vasele and English.

They had reached a sort of boat. In the middle of two sturdy but pointed logs—outriggers—and lashed to them by creepers, was a larger log roughly hollowed out. This hollowed log was filled with roots and leaves. Friday began to pack them tightly together to make room and added to them the few leaves, dark red leaves, he had, stuck in his loin cloth. It seemed a most primitive boat, an unnecessarily solid and cumbersome boat.

Friday began to push the boat out into the lagoon. Halliday helped him. They climbed into the boat. There was only one paddle. Friday splashed them both with water and they were ready for the voyage.

To their right the sky had perceptibly begun to lighten. Dawn was coming. Halliday glanced back at Friday grunting away as he paddled. Halliday found himself able to think more prosaically—he always did so in the mornings. Not that there was anything prosaic about the surroundings. What a place! He realised the private joy of the explorer. They had begun to move through a mist. A rose-coloured mist. A pink mist. It was not a lake they were on but a channel of water in the swamp. And it was

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an irrelevant act to wind his watch and to take two more of his paludrin tablets.

Hundreds of birds poised on long legs gazed at them as they passed. Low overhead, through the rose-mist, towards the East, flew silently a swarm of parrots. The crocodiles lay still, old scaled logs; the rushes looked to be snakes, the snakes to be rushes. The rushes and the snakes were veined and rusted, marked with circles and with knots.

The boat slid through carpets of plants. Lizards walked on the carpets and over the outer logs—changed colour as they sank. They were enclosed. And everything but the birds was disguised; nothing but the birds was what it first appeared. There were yellow trees that were brown, and brown and green that were yellow—and were not trees at all. The colours of the trees changed as fast as he thought. The colour of the mist was perpetually changing. But subtly. He was sure the dawn was exactly as it had been in the first dawn.

He did not know what to look at next, or what to give most attention to. The sky, or the water, or the land. Impossible choice. But as each temporarily dominated, so he was drawn.

At seven or eight the sun burst through the rose-mist so that it was thrust aside like a curtain. There was no gradation, no warning, suddenly a red sun shone over them, the swamp, and the multitude. Now the birds flying overhead were quiet no longer and cried and wheeled in the air and changed their colours to the colours of the sky. Thousands of waders began to scream out in welcome. The whole swamp clamoured. Only the snakes and the crocodiles remained silent—the crocodiles stiller, readier than ever.

It was not yet hot. Friday's face lost some of its good

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humour, his paddling some of its rhythm; he began to glance nervously up towards the red sun. As he paddled he kept to what shade he could. The sun grew hotter. Friday drove the boat into the thickest trees, covered himself with water once again, raised his hands to the top of his head in a gesture of respect, brought them down past his face and his beard, uttered a sound which began at the top of the scale and descended until it ended in a resonant bass like the bull frogs, lay down in the bottom of the boat and went to sleep. Halliday gazed at him for a while, and at the incredible dawn, and then feeling sleepy decided to do the same as Friday. Very shortly he too was fast asleep.

When Halliday woke it was late afternoon. Friday was still asleep, his mouth wide open, lying on his back, and snoring. A bearded black golliwog with a touch of grey in the beard. An older man than Halliday had thought in the dark. His most striking characteristic was his enormous shoulders—quite out of proportion—as Halliday understood human proportions. Halliday let him be and studied his possessions in the satchel. He had a waterproof tin, a tin of paludrin tablets, a pen-knife, a diary, an ancient camera, a pencil, and his watch. His watch said that the time was seven minutes to four. He was hungry, but waited for Friday to eat with him.

He examined the plants and roots in the pile in the bottom of the boat. There it was! The plant he had been looking for. He took up a leaf in his hand, sniffed it, crushed it in his fingers and tasted it. He carefully wrapped some leaves inside the waterproof map and stowed it away in his satchel.

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At four o'clock Friday woke. He woke immediately, nodded at Halliday, apparently not at all disconcerted to see him there, made again that gesture of respect in which he drew his hands from the top of his head past his face and his beard, then produced some cassava roots from the pile, handing Halliday his share first. As they ate he seemed to think it his duty to teach Halliday a few words of his language, but did not appear to be interested in learning Halliday's equivalents. This was such a reverse of what Halliday had unconsciously expected that he started to laugh again. Friday joined in as before.

And in spite of the melancholy and brutal set of his countenance in repose, Friday managed to convey to Halliday, after much hard work on both sides, that he was the strongest and the happiest man of all the 'servants' in his village. The servants? Yes, that was what he seemed to mean. Didn't he mean the people? No, he meant the 'servants'. Those who did the work—as opposed to those who gave the orders—as opposed to the 'chiefs'.

They had long finished their meal. Friday glanced up at the sky, pushed the boat out from the bank, splashed them with water, and resumed his paddling.

Halliday tried to ask him why this periodic dousing was so necessary. Friday did not seem to understand the question. Halliday began again, enacting an elaborate pantomime of splashing, gesture and grimace. Friday considered him kindly, gravely, as if he thought Halliday mad, because such a question had no need of an answer—in fact was obvious and understood by all men. Halliday persisted: Friday smiled at him implying that at last he understood—Halliday's questioning was some sort of joke. They laughed together politely; Halliday gave up, turned from Friday to the surroundings.

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They were in a current and this current was bearing them down. In the sunset—which Halliday had always held to be the best time of the day in Africa—this part of the swamp grew evil. They passed an old monkey moaning like a child, as Friday had moaned by the fire. Halliday was silent; the questions that had begun to demand an answer would be answered sooner or later. He knew that.

A common rat bumped against one of the outer logs, dived, re-emerged: a crocodile slid into the water after the rat. Halliday was struck by the sensation that they were moving *down* to their destination. And by the thought that the crocodiles here gave the impression of moving down even when palpably swimming upstream.

Friday had stopped paddling and was merely steering the boat. The water was moving faster than they. At each bend they would be cast aside by the current and swing in a slow circle until Friday gave them a push out into the main current again. It was at one of these bends that Friday fell into the water. As before, the current swirled them towards the bank—bow first, where Halliday sat. As before, Friday dug his paddle hard into the mud to manœuvre back into the main stream, but when he dug the paddle into the water this time it was either deeper than he had anticipated or there was a pothole in the mud for he overbalanced and fell into the water two or three feet from the bank, still holding on to the paddle. Friday fell into the water, the log boat bumped against the bank, Friday re-emerged from the water, the log boat rebounded from the bank so that its stern swung round and cracked Friday on the head. Friday again disappeared under the water. Halliday jumped in immediately and eventually succeeded in bringing Friday out; he part walked, part

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swam, towards the bank carrying Friday in his arms. He was terrified of crocodiles and every local fish—he heard himself shouting out abuse and swearing hysterically at the top of his voice—all heroic conventions ignored. He was very glad when he was at last able to lay Friday down on the bank and begin to revive him. Friday was still holding on to the paddle. Halliday worked steadily; there was plenty of water in the negro's lungs.

When Friday regained consciousness and recovered, not only did he manage to convey his gratitude, he also managed to convey that Halliday had behaved just as he, Friday, would have predicted and that his previous judgment of Halliday had been confirmed. Halliday put out his hand, Friday took it, shook it up and down. They decided to continue. They were fortunate in finding the log-boat grounded in the mud a hundred yards downstream on their side of the bank. When they were safely in the boat again Friday began once more to convey to Halliday how grateful he was.

The stream grew broader, slowed: they were entering a lake. The air smelt fresher and not so sweet. There were no crocodiles here, no fish. Friday began to paddle them out into the lake.

Now the air had a tang to it. Why? Halliday cupped his hand over the side and tasted the water. The water tasted bitter and of salt—but not like the sea. “Diani,” said the negro shaking his head vigorously, “Diani.”

Even though they were now in the centre of a broad lake the current moved across it, bore them on. Friday spoke again, shook his head again and pointed ahead. Hundreds of dead trees stood up in the water before them.

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What Halliday had taken to be the edge of the lake in the dusk was a sunken forest. "Diani," the negro repeated.

They slid through the dead forest cracking the brittle wood. The branches were covered with spiders. Seizing their chance to be free the spiders scuttled along from all directions and dropped on to the men and the boat like rain.

They had left the forest and were approaching another channel at the far side of the lake. On this side of the lake Halliday saw that here too everything was dead. "Diani," he said to himself. Black and adhesive, the shore might have been flung up from a sewer. The flowers were intact as if death had just happened, and the cause had carried with it some preservative of shape and substance. The setting sun shone here as it would on coal.

They entered the stream. The scourged shores gradually receded; resuming life and colour. Everything lived again, but was about to sleep. The dusk was coming fast. And with the dusk the wind turned round, freshened into their faces and ruffled countless little spider's webs in the trees ahead so that with the dew they twinkled in the light. And unbelievably as they passed under these branches the spiders in the boat somehow or other swung themselves up into the air and joined their brothers. In those branches was commotion: another war had begun. But it passed so briefly that perhaps the newcomers had been accepted. Or being surprisers had instantly overcome.

Halliday saw that Friday was smiling; they were nearly home. And it was then that Halliday was glad he was a doctor and able to maintain some of the perspective he had thought so essential the night before: as they moved

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round a bend in the river, and the night wind blew stronger into their faces, a sickening stench was carried towards them. But Friday, grinning broadly, nodding at Halliday for the hundredth time, dug his paddle into the water and began to urge them towards this stench. Urging them home.

As they hurried forward Halliday realised why their cumbersome boat had been so protectively and so solidly built: dozens of crocodiles pushed and snapped against the outer logs.

Jostled by the mass of crocodiles, borne on by the current, Halliday and Friday approached the bank. Halliday was worried that they land safely. The stench was appalling. He was relieved to see that there were several boats lashed together by creepers, that the bank was cut artificially sheer from the river above the log boats.

On this bank above them was gathered a little crowd of villagers. Softly one of these negroes began to beat a single drum: the jostling crocodiles slid away downstream. The drum was one of those that had so affected Halliday the night before.

Friday lashed their boat to the others. They walked carefully across the floating logs. Several hands helped them up over the steep bank. So there he stood on the edge of the village. Gulliver! The air was putrid. He rubbed the back of his hand against his nose. He smelled the back of his hand. "Jesus Christ," he said.

Now he understood by the silence of those around him that the Chief was coming. He remembered Friday's insistence that *he* was merely a 'servant'. The other 'servants' fell respectfully back. Friday pointed fearfully.

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And once again that curious beseeching expression crossed his face, an expression that seemed to convey that he Friday did not expect miracles of Halliday but that Halliday was a strong and healthy ally—another ‘servant’—and that all possible help was welcome here.

It was not one ‘chief’ that was shambling up the path towards him but several. Their bodies waving gently from side to side beneath enormous straw hats, they approached like human sunflowers. Some old, some young. All were men.

As they stared at him Halliday saw a hardening on their poor tormented faces. They conveyed that all things must remain as they were and had been. They willed him to understand that they who had so little, who lived on so little, who had been so lacerated by nature, but who had managed for generations to fulfil both a self-protective and a paternal role, could not and would not lose what they had. That if he, this huge white man, the like of whom they had never seen before, standing there smiling at them beneath his mass of flaming red hair, chose in any way to destroy their security, they would not endure it. They did not yet view him in the same affectionate light as Friday did. But was he imagining all this?

Halliday stretched out his arms. “Hello,” he said. “I love you every one.” There was no answer.

Halliday decided to continue his greeting in a conventional manner, like any heroic Englishman: humour was the thing. He smiled even more broadly, reached out to Friday standing loyally and nervously beside him, patted his friend on the top of his grey head, drew him closer, put an arm about his shoulders and announced: “This is my dear friend Friday. I am Doctor Crusoe I presume. I love you all. All.” There was still silence.

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Halliday kissed Friday on both cheeks and laughed cheerfully. Fortunately Friday joined in. But more tentatively than usual. The diseased chiefs remained silent: the laughter ceased.

Friday spoke—spoke nervously and quickly. Spoke entreatingly. He pointed out Halliday's strength, to Halliday's clothes, and finally at Halliday's red hair. Halliday thought there must be some special significance in this. He talked for a long time and ended by describing how Halliday had saved his life. Still the chiefs were silent.

Friday fell on his knees; Halliday was inspired to do the same. The diseased negroes considered them both, drew together, debated. It seemed to Halliday that the oldest chief was adamant, shaking his head repeatedly, shaking his head at Halliday, pointing downstream; perhaps he had seen a white man before, Friday began to shiver. The old man walked towards the drum, tapped his fingers on it—the funeral drum. The servants sighed; Friday began to moan, cried out miserably, beat his forehead with his hands. But the chiefs went on arguing.

The discussion ended. The old chief turned dejectedly away from the group. For some reason he began to weep, screwing up his face like a baby. A bundle of instincts that had passed from baby's face to baby's face. It was extraordinary that he persisted—just a bundle of ancient habits. On his head three curly silver hairs still stood, and the veins on his arms might have been deliberately painted in Indian red. The tears rolled down his cheeks.

The diseased negro who seemed to be the leader of the chiefs, and whom Halliday was later to know as Kono, came towards him, stared not unkindly down, then turn-

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ing his attention to poor Friday, patted Friday negligently on the shoulder. To Halliday this negligent patting implied that Friday was without importance, without intelligence, and therefore had done no conscious wrong. It was perfectly understood why Halliday had been brought—after all the chiefs had not seen a white man either. And seeing such a one now they could understand Friday's impulse and why he had thought Halliday might be of use. Perhaps, thought Halliday, this act of initiative will not be Friday's last.

Kono turned to Halliday once more, contemplated him, gave an order. Friday cried out in delight and relief, he and Halliday stood up, and surrounded by servants they proceeded down the little slope into the village.

They were on an island. The village was the centre of the island, which was passed on both sides by moving water. Beyond the water as far as he could see was dense swamp, on all sides. Where the streams swung stronger against the banks huge piles of stone had been carried to strengthen them. And tough grass and red shrub planted to bind. It was the time of year when this shrub was flowering: they were encircled by scarlet petals blowing gently in the evening wind now freshening from the South. Although it was almost dusk there were no lights in the village.

Halliday saw that these servant negroes around him were scrawny men resembling rather the bushmen in the South African deserts than the Ovimbundu or the Vasele in Angola. Their bodies were a dingy yellow-brown, their black eyes deep set—the brows above protruding—not that they protruded as did the brows of the diseased walking in that compact group behind. Friday had not lied when he had claimed to be the largest and strongest man

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in the village—his people's ribs showed like kittens; their frizzy hair scraped tight upon their skulls.

Of course Friday was walking proudly, conscious of many admiring glances. But now and again he would point out to Halliday the condition of these under-nourished people around them.

They entered the village. In its centre, fed by a running stream, was a large shallow pool of water. From the doorways of the huts surrounding the pool old men and old women were shepherding children into the water—children of both kinds—normal and diseased.

The huts were built on stone and wooden piles. The thatched roofs were often conical in shape. Few of them had walls. One hut however had no roof but stood like a pit above the earth—a solid circular mud wall. There was no entrance to this curious little building—a creeper ladder led up one side and disappeared over the top. It occurred to Halliday that this building might be used for storing: it looked to him somewhat like a silage bin. It was the only unshaded building in the village.

The procession halted: Halliday looked more closely around him at the village huts. Certainly they were of unusual design. Now the thin children and the women gathered shrieking with bewilderment and excitement. They were a great deal more articulate than the men had been. Several of these women had that fatty development of the buttocks he knew as *Steatopygia*, and comically and incongruously all were naked but for their enormous straw hats. The smell here was worse than ever.

In all the huts, baskets stood slowly dripping water. On the ground to the right of him, beneath the first floor of a hut, one old servant lay asleep—a steady drip of water falling on to his stomach from a basket above. Some of the

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women went back to washing their babies in the pool. Huge leafy trees grew between the huts giving the village the maximum of shade.

Kono shouted; dozens of pairs of hands threw Halliday up into the air and out into the shallow pool. He fell with an enormous splash, thoughtful but still grinning. He had made up his mind that whatever decisions he would eventually come to or make, for the present the only sensible thing was to conform. He had no idea of the ramifications of this extraordinary community he found himself among, its habits or its customs. And he had only a vague idea as to why he had been brought by Friday. What went on in that servant's brain? But it obviously behoved him to conform. Halliday splashed himself assiduously, grinning all the while, then made his way slowly to the shore. He was getting fed up with this continual dousing.

At the pool's edge he bowed low to Kono, the 'chief of chiefs' and respectfully waited. It was difficult for him to keep smiling at close quarters. Not only because of Kono's breath, but because even a doctor such as he could not help but have moments of horror at such a human face. "Compassion's the thing," he muttered to himself and noticed he was clenching his fists. Kono considered him again, not unsympathetically, turned to Friday and spoke to Friday at length. It seemed that Halliday was to be Friday's responsibility until the time that Halliday was accepted as a valuable and reliable member of the community. Otherwise . . . Kono pointed downstream.

Friday nodded, bowed to Kono, took Halliday by the hand. The villagers parted. Life went on.

Friday linked an arm in Halliday's and began to lead him across the square to the huts at the far end of the

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village. As they walked he continually paused to point out the physical condition of those around and to demonstrate how he and Halliday were friends, and stronger than they, and together would fish, bring food, carry water and serve. There was apparently no notion in Friday's head that Halliday would refuse or have different or more complex ideas of his own.

They reached Friday's hut. A larger hut than most. Rats underneath the piles. Baskets of water on the floor above. Inside in the dusk, more introductions were made; it seemed that Friday had two wives and that the wives were sisters and looked identical. Perhaps, thought Halliday, they were twins. Friday managed to convey proudly that he was the only husband in the community capable of so much support. None of the sons was as tall or as strong as the father. There was only one daughter.

After they had eaten and Friday had demonstrated yet again Halliday's clenched fist and how to punch, and pointed out Halliday's muscles, they lay down to sleep.

The moon had risen. Halliday found himself lying beside Friday's daughter. A girl of seventeen or so. He asked her her name. "Kamante," she said, "Kamante." She had lighter eyes he noticed than was usual with negro women. They were large eyes. Enormous liquid eyes looking up at him in the moonlight. He lay there staring at her till she fell asleep.

He began to think. He was thinking what was to be done, what could be done.

He was getting used to the snoring and the rats but not to the cockroaches and the fleas. Everyone snored except the little negress beside him.

In the night the wind dropped and consequently the

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smell of decay settled more tightly over the village. They were shut off from the world like lepers.

He thought.

Halliday got up and tiptoed barefooted from the hut. Nobody stirred. They lay on their backs, mouths open, huddled together in exhausted sleep. Only Friday slept with a smile on his face—dreaming proudly of his discovery perhaps—of the new servant.

Halliday began to walk under the huge palm trees down the main street. He came to the 'silage bin'. He climbed up its mud wall on the creeper ladder and peered down inside. Inside, nothing. He descended inside and stood on the ground. Nothing. He touched the walls with his hands. And the ground. He smelled his hands. There was a different smell on his fingers. He recognised it well. He rubbed the palms of his hands against those smooth brown walls again. They smelled of fear—human fear. He climbed out of the prison.

Now the moon shone directly above him but the street was shaded from it. He found a patch of moonlight and stood in it looking into the nearby huts. None of the negroes seemed to him to be sleeping well. It was a beautiful night. A night that might have brought peace to the most defeated, the most exhausted man on earth. But he felt that the sleepers around him lived too hard, and too wretchedly, ever to be able to get up and run out and stare into this night sky. They could not do so. They were not well enough. They were too tired. Yet he felt also that had they been well, and were they ever well, they too could give themselves to this beautiful night as he was doing. That but for their wretched exhausted squalor they too would have had the perception to rise and run out into this evening. As he could.

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He stood compassionately surveying the village. It seemed to him in the moonlight that these people were prohibited by their wretchedness not only from seeing the beauty of this particular evening but from all glory. Prohibited from the sweetness of the world. He felt great tenderness for them.

When that hot soft mist began to slide under the palm trees up the main street and now far away he heard the crying of the marsh birds, he too felt sleepy at last and began to walk quietly back to his hut. He stopped. Someone was coming towards him up the street. He stood quite still. It was the little negress, Kamante.

Halliday took her black hand, smiled, and walked Kamante back to her father's hut. There was nothing for them to say to each other: he lay down beside her again, they fell asleep. No owls hooted here; no dogs barked; nobody stirred.

When he awoke everybody was up but Kamante. Friday was standing over him and beaming, a fish in his hands—a dried fish cured by the sun. Kamante too was smiling in her sleep so that when Halliday smiled up at his friend Friday all three were smiling. There was, thought Halliday, something courageous about Kamante. And something frail. And she was clean.

Friday stretched out a hand, Halliday took it, stood up. Immediately he did so Kamante woke, stood up beside him. "Hello," said Friday in English. "Hello, Friday," said Halliday.

Halliday ate the fish, then the three of them went down to the pool, immersed themselves in the water. Most of the inhabitants of the village were already immersing. The old

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men perched on the roof tops were throwing in the children.

Halliday sat in the water beside Friday and Kamante observing the villagers, easing the ache in his back. It occurred to him he must do something about his clothes: at this present rate of saturation they would quickly rot. Some of the villagers were wearing those curious loin cloth aprons this morning. He realised now they were for carrying water. He was correct in his former observations of their general state of health—they were an under-nourished people all right.

One of the chiefs entered the pool, sat opposite; they nodded to each other. They surveyed each other: Halliday's mind became clinical. He listened to their speech: he had an idea that it was similar to that of the Bushmen of the Kalahari, so many miles to the South.

Friday stood up in the water signifying that it was time to go fishing before it got too hot, signifying to Halliday to come and learn and help. Halliday shook his head. Friday was bewildered. This was the whole point as far as he was concerned. He tried again. His gestures grew as vehement as on that former occasion when Halliday had refused to douse himself in the swamp. Halliday shook his head very firmly. Friday walked dejectedly out of the water. Halliday remained. At the edge of the pool Friday hesitated, looked back; Halliday waved him on. He sat in the water watching this strange childlike dedicated man walking off to fish, then turned his attention back to the diseased chief. Irrelevantly it occurred to him that surely in these circumstances it would have been better for Friday to sleep in the day and fish at night. But perhaps Friday was afraid of the darkness. And the sacred crocodiles.

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The chief left the pool and so did Halliday. He passed that day observing the routine. And of course they observed him. Particularly Kono. He behaved himself. He conformed. He was peaceful all day long. He tried to make Kono understand he was tired and having a necessary rest.

The diseased moved among the people like priests—directing, cajoling, in confident, enigmatic tones. Dominating. Shambling, horrifying, decaying, all-powerful high priests, their sunken eyes lit up by that necessary intelligence. The corrupters! Or so they looked to him this morning. He was reminded of priests, of politicians, and of officials of all kinds!

The day went on. At noon all lay still.

Some of the chiefs today were wearing wet moss hats on their heads instead of the straw sunflower ones. He saw that their hair underneath was not crinkly like the servants but long, straight and brown.

When the sun was at its hottest overhead the servants went diligently, went slowly, went carefully, dousing the chiefs with water. Now and again a chief cried out. At three-thirty by his watch, one of the servants began to bear a child. Halliday went to look but did not help. The baby died.

Several of the diseased women had sat in a circle round the expectant mother. Two had had the energy to act as midwives. No-one else was allowed in the circle. The anxious father sat by the door. The mother lay in a reed hammock in which a hole had been made. When the baby came it was dropped through the hole into a basket filled with water. Halliday thought it a rough introduction to

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life. Or in this case, to death. Perhaps this particular child would not have survived in any event. But on the other hand perhaps it could have.

In the early afternoon Kamante brought him a bowl of something like porridge. He asked her what it was. She took him by the hand and led him a little way from the village to where the women were gathering tiny seeds of grass—gathering them and pounding them with heavy sticks in deep wooden bowls—pounding them into grass flour.

He expected Kamante to leave him after that but the girl followed him wherever he went for the rest of the day. He asked her about the childbirths and after a long and arduous talk understood from her that if a child developed a fever the midwives always drenched it with cold water in the night or exposed it to the night winds on the theory that children die because they get too hot. He understood from Kamante also that many children died at birth in the village and that if ever twins were born the second was always killed once it was certain that the elder lived. He judged for himself that this must be because the mothers here lacked milk.

He found that they smiled at each other many times during their difficult conversation with its painstaking gestures and its drawings in the dust. Certainly she was not typical of the women here. He could not make up his mind whether her devotion to himself was on her own account or at her father's command. He thought to ask her why she was not married: she was obviously older than many who were. She shook her head. He persisted. So pointing to the thinness of her waist she drew a wasp in the dust. "As thin as a wasp," said Halliday and comfortingly put out his hand and rubbed her frizzy hair. To his

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astonishment the girl burst into tears, got up, and hurried away down the street. It was then he noticed for the first time that she limped. The incident had affected him almost as much as the place: he sat there staring.

In the late afternoon Friday returned with five fish—unfortunately no subsequent miracle was enacted. But they were large fish. Friday gave three of them to Kono, two he was allowed to keep for his family and his guest. Others of the servants returned with fish. Halliday saw that the best were kept for the chiefs. Oh yes, these people were starving; all consequent diseases were theirs.

At dusk the funeral drums were beaten, the crocodiles gathered, and the very old dead chief, who had so objected to Halliday's presence, was painted with red and white stripes, was slid out into the water at the North end of the island. "Tabete," they said. War in the water; tears in some eyes; the chant telling of the wandering of the old man's soul.

The ancient widow—one of the diseased—rubbed against a rock a piece of stone so that the dust drifted off on the dry breeze after her husband. The drums ceased; the chant ceased; the crocodiles slid away up stream. One more gone. The ancient widow looked over at Halliday, briefly and mournfully shook her head.

And Halliday thought that soon all would be gone. Perhaps once this community had been a larger, a more prosperous one. There were several disused and overgrown huts. Yes, he could see an end. And he supposed Friday could too.

Darkness came. No fires. No lights in the village. Tonight the night was hotter and throughout it the servants rose periodically to douse their masters with

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water. Then themselves. Automatically. Half asleep as they worked.

The next day he again refused to go fishing. Again Friday was upset. This day one of the diseased women bore a child. A child like herself. Into the basket of water dropped the baby. Re-emerged. Lived. There was rejoicing.

At this dusk the girls began clapping their hands, began singing. But slowly, carefully. And the old men filled their loin-cloth aprons from the shallow pool, splashed the singing girls. Some of the young men then began to dance in front of these girls as though courting them. But slowly, carefully, periodically. Like courting birds. And they too were splashed with water by old men in aprons. These young men slowly danced closer and closer to the girls, stretching out their arms, but not touching. Now one of the girls left her line to dance beside one of the men. The man responded, showing his desire, holding out his hands as if to take her in his arms.

Kamante was not dancing. She was sitting in the shadows beside Halliday. Moving close to him so that he could feel the warmth of her leg. And he saw that on each of her thighs she had made an incision some five or six inches long with a sharp stone and in the cuts she had smeared dust and grit to coagulate the blood. Although several of the young women had as many as twenty such scars on each thigh and therefore she had shown restraint, he felt a sense of shock when he realised she had scarred herself to attract him.

As the night went on the dancing remained stately and slow, and still the old men threw the water on the dancers. The chiefs watched beneath their hats, controlling. And

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even when the moon was full and high and the dancing did become a little faster and the girls played formally at getting captured as wives, or pretending to be bridegrooms, it was all done consciously—controlledly—a pale enactment of what this ceremony had once been and still is elsewhere.

And that night in the hut as he lay beside Kamante he found himself to be more conscious of and disturbed by her presence than ever before, but behaved as Frances Irving had behaved when she had been tired or uninterested in him in that bed of hers in the King's Road so often and so many years ago—pretending to be asleep when she wasn't, rejecting his hand or his arm, turning away from him to the furthest point of the narrow bed.

After his fourth day of observation Halliday determined he must find his men, send word back to Alejo at Katopos, get medical supplies. He sat on the edge of the pool with Friday drawing in the dust, gesturing, miming, doing his best to explain. He explained why he had not gone fishing, what he wanted to do for Friday's people, that he wanted to make them better, that he was a healer, a doctor, and that he was worried about his own men. It wasn't quite clear to him how much Friday understood but Friday understood enough and was visibly cheered. So Friday agreed to guide Halliday back through the swamps should they get permission from the chiefs. They went to Kono's hut.

All the while Friday talked with such humility to Kono the diseased men watched Halliday with intense concentration, revaluing. Once Kono gestured imperiously to Halliday to douse him with water from one of the baskets.

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All right Caliban, thought Halliday, and did so. Not that he disliked Kono. How could anyone? At the end of the conversation Kono gave Friday the necessary permission to guide Halliday back to the edge of the swamps but indicated quite clearly that Friday was to return alone. Friday was appalled; Kono adamant. Friday nodded his head obsequiously. There then occurred Friday's first hypocritical and disloyal act: as they turned to leave Kono's hut Friday gave Halliday a humorous, a knowing, and an unmistakable wink.

They set out at dusk. Kamante walked with them up the path to the boats to see them off. She looked so anxious as she stood so proud and still on the bank, consciously pushing out her young chest towards Halliday, that he was impelled to tell her the secret of his returning and once again to rub his hand through her frizzy hair; the girl cried out in relief.

They set off together, he and Friday amid the crocodiles, paddling hard here where the current flowed more freely to get upstream. Friday was talkative in the swamp tonight. Halliday was beginning to be able to follow the gist of his speech. Friday was talking about birds. And that was what Halliday felt himself to be that evening—a bird—a bird of passage. He was hardly aware of the swamp. He was contemplating—remembering—sorting things out. The swarms of buzzing insects around him were no bother to him now: he was absorbed. But he paddled harder than Friday, and was able to breathe deeply for the first time for four days.

Upstream they went, into the winding channels. Up and up. Across the lake, past the scoured shores. Under the trees of spiders. Cracked through the dead forest, slid through the white and gold flowers, crushed into the

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carpet of insects. After the dawn they drove into the bank. Friday slept. But not Halliday; he had begun to write his letter to Alejo on the pages of his diary.

Two days from the village, South West of the swamp, they saw the smoke of a fire. Friday cried out; Halliday reassured him. That night they left their boat to push their way into the jungle in the direction of the fire. Friday was trembling. Halliday would give him a comforting hug, or a pat on his shoulder. And they proceeded.

Where the jungle grew thickest so that Halliday was temporarily lost, it was Friday who found the way in the moonlight. He seemed to be able to smell that fire.

They had almost reached the clearing. Friday hesitated by a stream, stayed there. Halliday conveyed to him that he was to wait. Friday smiled wanly, agreed. And as Halliday moved off Friday reached out and gave Halliday exactly the same kind of hug he had himself been so reassured by during their progress towards the fire. Then Friday sat down in the stream.

In the clearing Abraham and Isaac were overjoyed to see Halliday but contrite too and fearful of his anger. He reassured them as he had his new friend. They sat together and talked and talked and he told them what they were to do, and what they were to tell Doctor Alejo. Then he started to finish his letter, which ran:

Alejo:

I have stumbled upon the most interesting and extraordinary community. It's very exciting! I think it best I go back to them and stay for a while to see what I can do. I'm due for a holiday you must admit and after all, such opportunities don't occur often. I've told Abraham and Isaac all about what happened so they should be able to fill in what I leave out.

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I'm so excited! I love you, my dear old friend.

Now! These people live right in the heart of a swamp. What a place! Fantastic! And they seem to me in many respects like the Bushmen of the Kalahari—not at all the sort of negro one would expect to find up here. Didn't you once say something about the Bushmen extending over a very large area at one time?

Anyway they do look like Bushmen: small, dingy yellow brown, black eyes, deep-set sort of triangular faces. They are awfully slight—like girls—except for one or two of them. Particularly the one I call Friday. He likes me and I him and he is the one I met first. He's very cheerful and easily the most solid of them all. At least of the ones I've got to know, or seen about in the village so far. He spends his whole life in the service of his extraordinary community—in fact a man like yourself.

Another curious thing before I forget is that their eyes look a bit Mongol.

Also unlike the Bushmen they have learned to plant seeds. Also they know something of natural drugs. They need to! But *no animals*. No dogs—nothing. And they don't kill animals. No weapons in the village—I think I know the reason for that.

I pause because I've just had rather a strange thought Alejo—you know what I'm like sometimes—we have just crossed through a sunken forest—I suppose the land sank recently or something—and our log boat crashed straight through the dead brittle wood—the dead trees—well, anyway—I don't know quite what I want to say or tell you but it's just that I feel this whole business has, or will have some *personal* significance—a significance beyond that which may appear to you or to others. I don't really know what I am trying to say—it's certainly not logical—in fact perhaps it's not explainable at all—really I must get on and give you the facts—no, it's just that this whole incident seems to be obtaining some *special* significance for me—some 'poetic'

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significance if you like, and if you know what I mean. I'm sure I'm never going to forget all this or be quite the same again. It's a very odd feeling to have. Perhaps I'll soon get over it and am writing a lot of muddled nonsense.

Anyway to continue: I tried to learn the villagers' language a bit. 'Kun' is a man, 'Ka' means to eat—but only when it's high pitched—when halfway pitched it means something quite different which I haven't yet followed and when it's low pitched something different again which I think is 'to flow' or 'gush out' but am not quite sure. They seem to use the same word for 'he', 'she' and 'it' but what I find very confusing is that they keep making clicking sounds when they speak—you know like we click at horses. Do the bushmen do this?

I've just read back what I've written and it must be jumbled up and confusing. It's hard to think straight—so much to think about at once! And remember! I must be more objective and scientific as old Lehmann used to say. How he would have been fascinated by this! I shall write to the *Quarterly Journal* about it.

The point is, God knows how this tiny community got where it is or how it was originally cut off, but I do know why it is where it is. And has kept where it is. They have shut themselves off from the world deliberately because a lot of them don't have any sweat glands.

It looks to be a hereditary condition and of course in this climate out here they have to keep their skin wet all the time or they die. You can imagine what they look like—horrible faces—sort of greenish white colour with protruding under lips and teeth like fangs. Really pretty ghastly and of course their breath absolutely stinks. The whole village stinks. However to be exact: there are many anomalies of the epidermis due to faulty evolution of the epiblastic layer of the blastoderm. Atrichosis congenitalis, with or without deformi-

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ties of the teeth and the finger and toe nails is usual and often accompanied by nevi. Sometimes they have no nails or teeth at all—seems a congenital absence. In one child I saw born there was a complete absence of the epidermis and appendages.

Their facies is suggestive of congenital syphilis: the skin hairless, dry, white, smooth and glossy. As I say, the development of the teeth is always defective.

Yes, dystrophic disturbances in the nails and strangely—well, not really of course—their scalp hair is not kinky but sparse, brown, and of fine soft texture. The cheek-bones are high and wide, the lower half of the face is narrow. The supra-orbital ridges are prominent—the nasal bridge depressed—forming a 'saddle-back nose.' The tip of the nose is small and turned up but the nostrils are huge and conspicuous. The eyebrows are scanty. The eyes slant upwards, producing a mongolian facies. At the buccal commissures radiating furrows, 'pseudo-rhagades' are present. The lips are thickened, the upper one being particularly protrusive.

They can't sweat.

Now what I think, Alejo, and please find out as soon as possible what you can—surely there are other isolated cases elsewhere—is that the affection is familial, generally affecting males, and might be due to an injury during the early months of uterine life. The third month? Eh? What do you think? Maybe you've seen it yourself but I can't remember you mentioning it. And just imagine a whole thirty or forty of them together!

Only one or two seem mentally deficient—in fact most of them are strangely intelligent—hypnotic sort of creatures—and I suppose they have a normal mentality because obviously the anlage of the nervous system is distinct from the cutaneous ectoderm long before the injury occurs.

Halliday stopped writing in the moonlight, pausing to

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think, to look around him, to read what he had written. He held out his hand to the fire. Somewhere in the darkness Friday would be sitting by a stream of water. Over Isaac's head, a little cloud of silver cobwebs was floating—not cobwebs but fragments of rushes, of bulrushes blown from the marshes by the evening wind. The little cloud was the first of many beginning to pass over the clearing and presently these clouds hung above him like some long gauze curtain trailing down from the moon, and not seeming to be moving at all. He began to write again.

These diseased negroes are of course fascinating and one feels much pity for them. And the way their minds work is a study in itself. I am longing to learn more of their speech—to talk to them in detail. Not that they seem anxious to talk to me and were obviously relieved to see me go. They have no idea of course that I am going back to them. Whether I can do anything for them, and what, is highly problematical.

Whether they should be allowed to reproduce is certainly a dilemma for any philosopher or a Catholic like yourself. Still we'll discuss that later! I think I know what you'll say!

But Alejo, the thing is that what is so really extraordinary to me is that three-quarters of the community are perfectly normal under-nourished negroes who have been conditioned to believe that they also have no sweat glands and would also die without constantly dousing themselves with water! They are dominated by the genuinely diseased, and the daily routine, or ritual, is fantastic. The diseased, out of protective necessity of course, have formed themselves into a ruling caste. Obviously by themselves, without their 'servants', they would die. Or life would be almost impossible for them. What I find so absorbing about these 'servants' is how completely what they have been conditioned to believe

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has come true for them. They're terrified of the sun—would die of fear if tied out in it. If they saw any sweat appearing on them would die if they didn't immediately douse themselves with water. They do everything so slowly of course. That's partly why they're starving to death, I imagine. Obviously the 'servants' must sweat occasionally—making love or something—but as I say they immediately douse themselves and cool down. In other words for them sweat is the symbol of death—or the indication of the approach of death and sickness. Yes, sweat is the beginning of death.

In fact in a way they're the sickest of the lot. They're paranoid—but not suffering from delusions of grandeur! To put it poetically, Alejo, the swamp water is all around them and with the continual dousing and the promptings and assurances and subjugations of their masters this swamp water has permeated right into their souls. And at this rate they're very shortly going to drown in it. For they *are* in a horrible physical condition.

I must finish and get the men off to you. I've drawn a rough sort of map and told them as well as I can where I'll be. They'll find me, sooner or later. The thing is to hit the swamp and go down-stream right into the middle of it. Besides, by the time they get back I may have a fire going somewhere on one of the little islands.

Lots of things of course I've yet to find out. How they got there, how long they've been there, etc. etc. Also how strong are the loyalties. Also what we can do. Also what are the legends—the sun is the enemy, you see.

Send me any supplies you can spare. I'd like to clear up a lot of the yaws on the women. Probably give them confidence. I've got some penicillin here. Also I'll circumcise some of the boys properly. Must gain their confidence slowly of course.

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So, my dear, find out what you can. Get someone back to me as soon as possible. I am very well myself.

I love you, I love you,
Benjamin

Overhead that silver gauze still trailed down from the moon but was definitely moving South now. Halliday gave his letter to Abraham. They talked together again of direction and of time. They peered at the compass. Both negroes gave Halliday a long look. They shook hands.

Halliday took up his rifle and checked it. He packed the oil, the supplies, the syringes, the knife, the compass and all the ammunition his men could spare. He moved away from the clearing to walk back to the patient Friday in the stream. Patient, he thought, in more ways than one.

The swamp lay silent, as it were taking a deep breath. Halliday remembered a passage somewhere in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. What was it exactly? Something like: 'Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags—rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No, you want a deliberate belief.'

I am about to undertake something deliberate, he thought. And wholehearted too. I am about to teach a starving negro he can sweat—that he can sweat and live. As he walked he could not help but compare Manda to the world. He could not help but compare it, though he realised there was nothing to compare.

In the dawn Friday and Halliday carefully approached the high bank. Unfortunately the ravenous crocodiles were not asleep. Nor were the flamingoes flying East

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overhead, and the rising sun below them picked up the red underneath their wings so that they shone in the empty sky like blood.

Halliday had barely slept on the return journey and was tired this morning; the dead forest had oppressed him and so had his long conversations with Friday. It was evident that Friday somewhat misunderstood his intentions in Manda, and who and what he was. He knew that Friday had conjured up for himself a vision of prosperity and happiness for the villagers—that the few medical supplies would re-vitalise and make well all the servants and then under Friday's and Halliday's direction they would work, fish, and cultivate the soil as never before. In Friday's devoted eyes the problem was simple and almost solved. Halliday both loved and was irritated by his ingenuous friend. However, he was cheered at reaching the island and since the wind blew from behind them this morning the air was reasonably sweet.

The boat slid in towards Manda. Friday smiled so happily and so confidently that Halliday was forced to look away from him. As they climbed across and up from the boats with the supplies, and gazed down at that little village in the centre of that solitary island, Halliday felt he had been here not once but many times before. He was very tired and he remembered when he had been a boy in Orkney and used to wake in the night and take in the room and the shapes and sounds outside the windows of the room with an immediate intimacy: shapes and sounds completely known, never to be forgotten. Manda was such a place—a place a man has lived in. And one day might die in. A place in which to devote oneself to the most searching investigation, to honest memories. So; would he die in Manda? The thought crossed his mind for the first

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time. And he remembered as he looked so solemnly down at Manda that one night in Orkney he had raised himself on his elbow, watched dark smoke curling up from a chimney pot across the way below their tall house, and on that particular occasion and in that similar mood the drifting smoke seemed to contain everything any one of us could experience, could think, could feel, or ever had done. As it was for that child in Orkney, so it was for this man Benjamin Halliday in Africa, in Manda, now. Just for a moment he stopped on the path and time dragged him backward and forward.

The two went on down the path, Friday carrying the medical supplies. Friday was jumping up and down with excitement. "Don't drop anything," said Halliday. Friday was clicking his tongue, punching Halliday in the ribs with a clenched fist. Friday danced like a child about to receive a present.

In the village many of the frail servants were rising—some were already immersing in the pool. Halliday's head had begun to ache: he shook it. He was not used to headaches. The pain grew.

A thin boy staggered out of a hut on his way to the pool, coughing. As the child coughed he lowered his head and bumped into one of the diseased chiefs crossing the little street to go in the same direction: angrily this chief pushed the starving child so that the child fell flat on his face—lay there.

On an uncontrollable impulse Halliday raised his rifle, fired three times into the air.

There was silence in the village and all around. Friday stood beside him like stone. Then the sudden clamour of the birds—shrieking, rising and screaming. The fallen child screamed, picked himself up off the earth, ran to his

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hut. The women and children in the pool started screaming. Many in the pool ran towards their huts. Some flinging themselves down on the floors, beating themselves insanely against these floors. Others remained in the pool and with outstretched arms, like crucified arms, plunged themselves deep into the water, hitting at the water, only their heads above the water, frenzied and screaming all the while. An interesting example of a chain of reactions! It had been hard to distinguish between the screams of the birds and the screams of the people.

Halliday stood in the street alone except for the bewildered simple man beside him. Something had gone wrong, he knew that. Something had momentarily snapped in him. But what exactly he did not know. He had never before acted so impulsively on a professional occasion. It was not at all what he had intended. He had intended to proceed by degrees—to insinuate himself—gradually to win their confidence, their gratitude and their affection.

However, perhaps it was not after all such a disaster. He stood there; he calmed himself. He had allowed himself to be too much affected by that thin, starving child! But then he had always been angered by such unkindnesses. Perhaps it had all occurred exactly right: a demonstration of power. He looked at Friday. Tears were trickling down the negro's face.

He walked away from Friday down the deserted street to the silage bin and sat with his back to its circular mud wall. Friday did not move. After a while the frenzied wailing ceased.

Halliday took off his pack, took out his provisions, laid his rifle across his knees and proceeded to eat his breakfast. Friday did not move. A half-hour passed; the sun

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rose higher. He sat in the sun's warmth with pleasure. His headache had long gone. He was growing sleepy and as was often the case with him before he slept, a phrase from a book or a poem he had read or learned would go round in his head like a tune. On this occasion it was that phrase from Lorca's poem about the death of the bull-fighter that Alejo was so fond of: 'At five in the afternoon. At five in the afternoon.' He dozed; he slept.

*Now the dove and the leopard wrestle
At five in the afternoon
Groups of silence in the corners
At five in the afternoon.*

Above his sleeping head curious, predatory birds gathered and circled in the sky. Buzzards, vultures, hawks. They came from North, South, East and West. They filled and darkened the sky over Manda. They panted, they spat, they licked their beaks. They spiralled between the sun and the trodden square. Their claws itched and bled. But he slept.

The chiefs with yellow fevered eyes glowing like torches began to move among the people. They touched the people, whispered to them, kissed them, inciting all. They laid their trembling hands on the children's heads, they pointed at the sleeping man, they pointed at the birds, they pointed at the silage bin, they pointed at the enemy the sun. Kono took on exactly the character and appearance of one of the vultures—he hobbled, his hands turned claws, he tore at his chest as he would tear at Halliday's flesh and offer it above.

But Halliday slept and dreamed of his father. His father wasn't dead at all. His mother had told him a lie. And they were walking down a country lane together in England in the Spring. And all the trees were in blossom.

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And blackbirds and speckled thrushes sang. "I'm so glad you're alive," said Halliday. "I've been longing to talk to you."

Kono's audience began to pant—drawing in their breath in great gulps to hiss it out. Some stamped their feet, some pounded on the earth, some dug their toes into the dust, scraping at it like hens. All the negroes' bodies became purposeful—even the bodies of the old. They were working towards fulfilment—towards murder. Only Friday stood still and detached. And now Kamante rushed across to her father, clung on to him, bit her nails and shivered with an uncontrollable fear.

The vultures, the buzzards and the hawks were hissing like the people. One or two of the women turned from hissing to screaming—high-pitched far-off screaming—as if the noise was emerging from the tops of their heads. The vultures began to scream. The vultures giggled and dribbled like babies. And some of them flopped and settled companionably, securely, and patiently on the roofs of the people's huts.

Kono moved his claws, clapped them together; the people gathered stones. They ran avidly here and there seeking the sharpest. They gathered the sharpest into a pile by the side of Kono's hut. The vultures approved and clucked. Some of the old vultures began to copulate.

So: "Kill, kill, kill." Kono threw the first stone.

It was not until this first stone bounced on to the ground in front of him, rolled forward and hit him on the shin, that Halliday woke from his ecstatic reunion with his father in a shock of pain. He sat for a moment blinking owlishly in the sunlight, realised something of the situation, and was aroused to an absolute sense of reality when a second stone hit him viciously on the chest.

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*“And the crowd was breaking the windows
At five in the afternoon,”* Halliday muttered.

Halliday stared about him in horror: the vultures laughed. Another stone hit him on the chest: the people chanted; the vultures chanted. Halliday stood up. And yet to him it was also pathetic: these diseased men and women were so fevered and weak in their stoning—these vultures so easy to destroy—so easy to despise. He saw the sky and the roof-tops were more crowded than the ground. He saw they needed each other—the people and the birds of prey. He bowed his head. One should help people like these, one should comfort them.

He started to move towards the stoning negroes with outstretched arms: for a moment it looked as if the group might waver and break, and when he raised his rifle and the knowledgeable vultures rose in the air from off the roof-tops, the negroes who had seen this ‘stick’ as the cause of that sound which had so recently shocked them with its tone of death, cried out in terror and *did* break. Fortunately or unfortunately Kono threw desperately a second time; the stone hit Halliday on the cheek, drew blood. The vultures smelt the blood, went mad in the sky. Halliday checked, put up his hand to his cheek, felt his blood. So the people again grew bold, re-assembled, and began to stone him so passionately that he turned, ran, climbed up the creeper ladder of the silage bin and peered into it looking for safety inside.

Kono shouted triumphantly, shouted decisively: the stoning ceased. Kono shouted again: the people ringed the silage bin, stared up at him from all sides, stones in their clenched hands; the birds stared down. Silence again in Manda. Halliday smiled for the first time since the stoning had begun: “I love you all,” he said.

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The bin was as empty as before, though he saw gleaming white in the sunlight what looked like a human bone. He saw that only Friday and Kamante stood outside the ring. Everyone was waiting. For what? For him to descend! He bowed to the chiefs. "Poor old things," he said. "I'm trying to love you."

He looked at the birds of prey. He looked at the sun climbing so fast to the centre of the sky. Very well; the moment was ripe. He climbed down the ladder into the prison, disappeared from the negroes' view. As he descended he heard a shout of triumph from the chiefs broken only by a desolate cry from Kamante: Friday, Kamante, and everyone in Manda had seen Doctor Halliday go to his death. As for the birds—they could afford to wait a little longer. The birds of prey are good at waiting.

It was hot inside. It was the hottest place in Manda—the sun trap—the death-cell—the gas chamber—the oven. This was where generations of recalcitrants, of sinners, of criminals, of malcontents had been interred. This was where they had sweated and died of fear. All of them. Like all prison walls these walls were smooth and worn. Then the dead bodies left for the scavengers—the patient birds of prey.

He sat down on the ground. He glanced curiously at the bone half buried in the corner, pulled it up out of the earth—it was part of a man's foot. Faintly swaying in over the top of the circular mud wall from the ring he heard the chant. Not altogether like the death chant he had heard when the old man had been slid out into the water—a deeper toned chant—a cruel chant.

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For what several acts of disobedience had negroes died here? He thought of prisons everywhere—of political prisoners in Europe and the East. He thought how lucky he had been. He heard a tapping on the walls from prisoners who had died. They sent him greetings. They asked him his name and his number. "This is a diseased century," they whispered. "We know the causes but cannot apply the cure. There are not enough of us to love. The healing knife is the executioner's knife." He lit himself a cigarette. He kept silent while they whispered their prophecies and their complaints. He kept silent while they described their torturers and their deaths. Their hands reached out to him from those smooth prison walls. He took their hands. He felt himself as innocent as they. The prison became crowded. Thousands of people were holding hands. He saw the bomb falling but stayed where he was. He realised he too was weeping—outside the ring he was sure Friday and Kamante were inconsolably weeping. What had we all come to? Where were we going?

The cruel singing continued.

His thoughts were not continuous. He had visions of men in white coats with hypodermic syringes, of men in black uniforms with truncheons and steel boots. "Confession is a formality," he muttered, "only the torture is real." "Hold till the pain becomes unbearable," a prisoner shouted from the wall. He began to wonder what was the average time of survival of the particular human prisoners who had lain in this open grave. Not long. Some men are better equipped for holding than others, we all know that. He sat there, wondering. He anticipated local events: he hollowed the ground to make himself comfortable, pulled his hat firmly over his eyes and once again went to sleep.

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His last thoughts before he did so were that no re-telling can ever quite convey the sensations that the dreamer has. That you yourself cannot remember exactly how it was but that at moments like these when you feel you *know* something of what goes wrong, at least the memory of something moving you forward stays with you, and that is why you are always trying to re-tell it, to re-live it. And yet you cannot. It's not possible. You move on in so many different ways. And as he fell asleep, the prisoner in the jail, he was wondering whether it was a doctor's function to cure, or merely serve. "I'm getting confused," he said aloud: "And perhaps I'm confusing doctors with everyone else." Whenever he tried to push a simple parallel too far—tried to read too much into the microcosm—he always got confused. The world is not so simple. Not so ordered.

He woke as if he had been wakened by an alarm-clock. The sun was directly overhead. The chant had swollen to fever pitch. Two presumptuous vultures perched motionlessly on the top of the circular wall above him. Several flew and circled in the sky directly overhead. He was covered and dripping with sweat. He stood up; the two vultures flew slowly, flew reluctantly into the air a little way above the prison. He oiled his rifle, checked it, loaded it full. He climbed up the ladder on to the top of the circular wall: the chant ceased.

For a moment or two the villagers watching the prison from the shade of the trees and the huts did not seem to be able to believe it was Halliday. He stood there on the top of the wall so that all could see him, took off his hat from over his red hair. He gleamed with sweat from head to foot.

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There he was, back from the dead, grinning down at them! "Hello, Friday," he shouted at the top of his voice. It was a superb entrance. No-one anywhere had ever made a better.

An incredulous cry rose up from the servants, then an admiring one. Then an infinitely pathetic cry from the chiefs. As Kamante started to run ecstatically across the square towards him Halliday raised his rifle to his shoulder and slowly and carefully shot those two presumptuous vultures, open-mouthed in the sky above. Humorously, ironically, as if to consummate the theatricality of his resurrection, to complete the legend as it were, one of these birds spiralled down from the sky so that it bounced off the roof of Kono's hut and fell in a mess of blood and feathers on the pile of stones at the diseased chief's feet.

Halliday sat watching the red sun disappear into the marsh. Nothing momentous had happened since he had shot the presumptuous vultures three days before. No-one had attacked him again. No stones fell as he walked down the streets with his rifle on his shoulder. The rifle was God.

His relationship with Friday however had changed. Although Friday's loyalty remained, Friday had realised that this white man was far more complex than himself and in fact was not understandable. Several times Friday had clenched his fist before Halliday, shook his head mournfully, then opened the fist wide, and solemnly nodded his head. Halliday took this gesture to show the necessity of peace: he too nodded his head. He saw that Friday and his sons took turns to guard him and he heard the sons calling him 'ju dole'—which he learned from

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Friday meant a dangerous man and a strange one. Friday shook his head at the rifle also.

Yes, Friday was bewildered by Halliday: here was a man who could sweat and live. It was all too much for Friday. He went about his routine tasks mechanically, a perplexed expression on his humble face; now and again he would turn round to look at Halliday to see he was still well, to see he was still substantial flesh and blood.

Kumante's simplicity was of a different order: to her he was unique. She loved him more, desired him more each day. She hid her emotions from no-one. So; Halliday accepted the present situation. He bided his time and slept at nights. Neither he nor anyone else had forgotten the moments of violence.

As he sat tonight outside Friday's hut he tried to read something of the minds of those about him. The flies whispered and clouded—backward and forward, all over the village, the island, and the swamp. He sat there in the flies watching these people he had so disturbed, a people as old as any on earth, trying to read something into each fleeting glance. He knew he must contain himself, must wait and observe. He knew also he was restless and longing to make another decisive move.

It was seven o'clock: he could tell this now from the sky and from the grass. He glanced at his watch to confirm he was right—such was his nature. Friday would be home from his fishing soon. How would one say Friday's poem in English? Something like:

*'When I come home from the fishing
The stars light me kindly from above.'*

He took out his scalpel and cut a hole in one of the little mud tunnels made by the termites round the piles of

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the hut. Immediately a white head appeared—knocked against the tunnel wall, called for help: others arrived, white and pink. In five minutes they had sealed the hole with sand and spit.

So what had he achieved but prove that he could sweat? There was no division of loyalties or allegiance to himself. No-one else had sweated. 'Ju dole'—a dangerous man and a strange one.

He had studied the language. He found he could understand it better than he could speak it—he couldn't yet use his stomach and chest to 'click' properly. There was nothing written in Manda and even the chiefs could only count to four—over that, two and two again. He had tended many of the sick; that at least had been helpful and had tangibly cheered Friday. Friday could understand that.

*"The grass is weeping for the wind
To get the rain
To get the rain to come,"* said Friday.

He must write their poems down.

But although the sick were grateful they were not as grateful as he wished: they did not love him yet and that was what he wanted. Once or twice he had been forced to heal at rifle point. Nobody sought him but Kamante. He was more alone in Manda than formerly. None of them had recognised themselves in Halliday; none were envious. The chiefs of course would not allow him near them.

This afternoon he had used up the last of those few medical supplies he had brought with him from Katopos. He had lanced a septic foot, injected some of the worst sufferers from yaws, treated some of the children for hook-worm. In the morning he and Friday had cleared the

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drinking water pools—this too had cheered Friday and was something he could understand. They had deepened the streams into the pools so that the water through them flowed faster—these semi-stagnant pools had contained recognisable fragments of human excrement and such a mass of animal organisms that they looked like bowls of pea soup: dysentery too was prevalent in Manda.

Kamante came out of the hut and sat down beside him, stroked his hand.

*“The wind comes and says, ‘the rain is on the way’,
My heart cries in the wind and says ‘I am alone’.”*

The moon was rising and serene enough. Another young woman paused in the dusk, smiled at Kamante. She was a typical case of *Steatopygia*, a basket of water on her head, and standing in that fat-hipped, sway-backed posture. She went on. Kamante went on stroking his hand. The young feminine heads here are beautifully heart-shaped on such slim necks, Halliday thought, but oh how quickly they grow old.

*“The wind comes and says, ‘the rain is on the way’,
My heart cries in the wind and says ‘I am alone’.”*

Kamante's poem this. He looked at her. He knew that he was beginning to feel an emotion for her that bordered on the tenderness of love but was not love. There was no passion in it. Was it pity?

She went on stroking his hand. Her forlornness and her devotion touched him. So did her lameness. He started brooding about this lameness now, looking at her with sad eyes. And it interested him as a doctor: he had noticed often how many men there are in the world for whom the least physical abnormality in a woman produces an immediate and pathological aversion. He was not such a man.

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On the contrary, he was inclined to feel kindred. Well, to a point. It was odd to be sitting here of all places thinking of psychological inhibitions in apparently normal people elsewhere in the world. How they tried to disguise themselves. Such a thing as lameness would never have prevented him loving a woman completely if he had ever found her. "Would it Kamante?" he asked in English. Kamante smiled. As for mental abnormality—well of course that's another thing. Or is it? "Is it Kamante?" he asked in English. Kamante smiled. Kamante went on stroking the back of his hand.

Oh yes, thought Halliday, it's ironic that her lameness has prevented her marrying in Manda but it's true of life it's true of the world. Kamante went on stroking the back of his hand.

There were preparations in the village. In the afternoon a group of twelve- and thirteen-year-old boys were marched away by Kono, Friday, and others of the chiefs and servants to the southern end of the island. Nobody objected overtly to Halliday going with them—he carried his rifle on his shoulder. Friday of course was pleased: he still hoped Halliday would become committed as simply as he was. Halliday was about to witness the puberty ordeals.

*"Let my digging stick uncover
Hidden ant eggs in the mud."*

They stayed at the southern end of Manda for a whole moon, feeding on their usual diet of roots, berries and fish. They danced much of the nights. The circumcisions were made with stones, grit and sand rubbed into the open wounds. Kono spoke of the tribal deities, of the sacredness of the crocodile, of the significance of water, of the enemy

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the sun, of the belovedness of the moon, and of 'sweat' the symbol of death.

*"When the morning comes, the stars follow
They go to seek the moon.
When the moon wanes
He does not die
He keeps his back
He grows again."*

The boys swore to the diseased chiefs oaths of loyalty, oaths of service—loyalty to the clan. Friday was chosen to demonstrate the mysteries of reproduction. Friday was flattered. He seemed to Halliday an admirable choice.

*"Let me eat and drink O woman
Give me what I sorely need."*

On the little black boys' ankles were placed rattles of the husks of wild beans, of dried moth cocoons. They arrayed themselves in marsh-bird feathers, in the beaks of white storks. So the boys danced in the moonlight, grunted and clicked their tongues, and the chant was slow and solemn. And for some of them very painful.

*"Let me open up a melon
Let me find a nest with eggs."*

Sometimes the frailer children fell exhausted but did not sweat. Sometimes some had fits. The boys were entranced. The boys saw visions.

*"Gaua created one man
Gaua created one woman
These were the first on earth
Gaua gave the man a soul
Gave the woman also."*

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*As he gave so he can take.
It is Gaua who sends the Rain."*

In another part of the island to the East the girls were similarly initiated and entertained. Halliday was shooed away by the old women when he approached the girls.

The puberty ceremonies ended; both parties returned to the village. That night they held their last dance—the Bull dance. The initiated children understood this dance. Two of the old men with dried horns on their heads hid themselves in the long grass at the side of the trodden square and when the dance reached its climax they joined the beating rhythmic procession, jogging up and down with the bull's horns in a humped-over position.

Throughout all these rites the water dousing had continued. Only Halliday sat there dry. Only Halliday sweated. There had been an interesting moment, a brief moment during the last dance; Kamante had danced for him. Apparently she had been unable to contain herself publicly. Yet no-one had seemed surprised, or resentful. It was a brief moment but a good one. She had sprung into the square before him, both her shoulders shivering violently and directly towards him. There had been a prolonged use of the pelvic muscles, the movement finally abandoning itself in a sinuous rolling motion. He had seen negresses dance so before. But she touched him, this lame girl.

And Kamante had smiled at him confidently; like all such women, she had moments of confidence. She was strong and she was weak. He sensed that the community thought this girl mad. He liked her for that too. She was only slightly mad—slightly mad and slightly lame. He

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shook his head at her, smiling. Who would not? He would have to make up his mind about Kamante. And in a sense the chiefs had made a comment: an extra dousing of water for Kamante.

A fortnight passed. He slept beside but not with Kamante. There was no mirror but he felt himself to be losing weight. The effect of the food and the problem maybe, or maybe he was being poisoned by these marshes.

*"The sky stands, the sky is still
It is the stars that walk."*

He had seen and learned many things. At dawn the men and women would rise and go to the bushes and then to the pool. For breakfast they'd eat the remains of the evening meal. The mothers would suckle the babies; the children play in the square. The mothers would fill the baskets with water, would feed the chiefs. The men would go fishing, and some of the women would hunt for roots and berries before the sun rose too high, so that only the old, the chiefs and the children were left behind in Manda. He had learned how to find honey; to tell the weight of a bee in flight and whether it flew towards the nest or away from it. He had marked bees' nests with sticks, as they did, for another time. He had learned always to leave a few berries on a bush; to tell whether there were larvae at its roots; to approach a bird's nest upwind and to take out one egg at a time so that the bird would not stop laying. He had learned their method of fishing.

Sometimes they had gone to other islands in the marshes, but never far from Manda. Only Friday had such courage. Or was this the law? It was so odd that, but

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for the fishing, these people never killed. It was odd because he knew the Bushmen of the deserts die if they do not hunt; it is not only for food they hunt—hunting is their love. Of course it was the chiefs who had decreed this law. There were no weapons in Manda, no spears. The chiefs dared not risk that. Sometime, long ago, this had been decreed. The gravest offence in Manda was to strike another man—for where would that have led?

Yes, thought Halliday, here in the marshes the crocodiles are sacred, the world teems with food and life, and the people starve. But there is more to it than this: the fish and the berries should be enough. It is the apathy of the fishers, the slow movements of the seekers. The chiefs do not want them to work too hard, nor think, nor question. And why should I? But I do. The rest is death. And yet . . . and yet here the healthy have such a simple task: they comfort the diseased.

It became the season of dry spasmodic winds. The villagers moved slower than ever, worked less. He too conserved his energies. One day towards noon a great brown dust-cloud whirled in over the marshes from the South, from the southern deserts of Africa. As it drew towards Manda it sucked up from the marshes the water, the tiny fishes, the tiny snakes, the flies and the spiders, right into the heart of the sky. The cloud halted over Manda, changed colour, suspended overhead like a huge bubble, and in this bubble in the sky Halliday could see the fishes and the water snakes still swimming.

Everyone was looking up. The bubble changed colour, changed texture, became a mirror, became the colour of the marshes. And *then* it was a perfect mirror so that what was on the earth below the sky was exactly reflected in the

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sky—so that for Halliday and the people of Manda everything had a double weight and dimension. So that the fish and the water snakes swimming in the marshes swam in exact motion with the fishes and the water snakes swimming in the sky; and the negroes and Halliday saw themselves in the sky looking down at themselves, and could see the island, and the scarlet flowers of Manda, and the huts and the trodden dancing square. Each colour, each shape, as it was; each thing moving or still, together.

It was not a mirage. It was a perfect reflection, an identical image; face to face. He stared up at his own face. They all did. Then at each others'. They were enclosed. It was the most beautiful and revealing sight of Halliday's life.

But the wind blew again, blew against the circle, broke it. Some of the fishes, some of the water snakes, fell on their heads; fell to the North of Manda. The flies fell, the spiders fell. The cloud re-formed, and blew North. A much darker cloud than that which had first appeared. The birds in the broken circle had seemed to be flying in the marsh water—swimming birds. The new cloud had drawn the birds North with it. The sky above Manda was temporarily deserted, was desolated. Perhaps the cloud was drowning these birds. Were they strewn to the North now? Were they dead in the Sahara? Doctor Halliday rubbed his eyes: the sky was quite empty above. Once again, he realised that he was weeping. It was twice he had wept in the marshes.

The heat suffocated them; the diseased prayed for rain. The pools on the island grew smaller. The marshes grew smaller. Other islands began to emerge. The sacred crocodiles started to bellow at night.

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The diseased lay in the water all day long, were fed there by the servants. Frogs appeared everywhere: on the roofs of the huts, on the walls, on the floors—in the darkness they flopped over the sleepers. Halliday and Kamante brushed them off each other's faces. At night these millions of frogs clamoured so that the concerted sound seemed to Halliday to be vaster than Africa itself.

He would lie there trying to distinguish and hold on to some individual croaking voice. At first it had seemed an impossible task but in the end he found that each one of this apparently limitless symphony of voices had some quality, some characteristic that was unique, and if truly concentrated on, and listened to, and sought out, *could* be followed till it ended, till it died, or till it moved on out of his hearing for reasons of its own.

The rains did not come but the frogs disappeared and they and the crocodiles stopped their clamouring. The days still burned, the negroes still worried, the pools continued to dry up, and the temperature in the nights dropped to a biting cold. In the darkness he and Kamante huddled together for warmth.

What they wanted, all of them, even in the marshes, was thunder and rain. Only the flies prospered. Halliday was conscientious about his malaria doses; he could not afford to be ill. They wanted thunder and rain that the berries, the orchid roots, and the bulbs they lived on would grow. The fish disappeared elsewhere. God knows where they have gone, thought Halliday. Can't they breathe in the swamp now?

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Yet the roots lived here as perhaps they lived nowhere else in Africa at this time. Bad as the conditions were, it was apparent how well and for how many reasons the diseased had chosen their home. If they were originally Bushmen from the Kalahari Halliday saw clearly why they had moved so far. How long had they searched? How many had died? In what century had their disease begun?

The drought continued. Even these huge marshes appeared to dwindle. By way of ancient habit and not through any fundamental insecurity Kono emerged briefly from the pool to throw down divining bones—four pieces of the hooves of buffalo, decorated with crosses and dots. But, thought Halliday, he doesn't wait long for the answers, nor greatly cares for them. He knows the drought will pass. He knows his home is a safe one—this is custom.

Halliday thought also there was a confusion both in his observations and his conclusions—‘paradoxical’ was a word he found himself speaking aloud more than once.

There came the day Halliday regained favour in Manda. The incident also gave him an idea. It had been an uneventful morning. ‘Kum bara’ Friday had said doubtfully after breakfast, shaking his head at the sky. Friday had done this for several mornings: Friday missed the fish.

“Good morning,” Halliday had said in polite answer.

“Good morning” had said Kamante with that patient feminine smile.

“Good morning,” Friday has said also, imitating his

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daughter's soft voice—for some reason Friday had persuaded himself that to speak well in English one had to speak as a woman. Halliday could not understand this process of reasoning and had fallen into a fit of laughter. For once Friday had not joined in—being offended. So Halliday had stopped laughing and apologetically bowed his head: Friday had accepted the apology with dignity. And it was then as they sat there that they had seen the fire.

At the South end of Manda a bush burst into flame. A small bush. There had been no lightning but suddenly this small dry withered bush burst into flame. Those who saw it began to scream as they had when Halliday fired his rifle. Once again several went mad in the pool. And it was Halliday who seized the nearest basket of water and ran and put out the fire before it became a blaze. When he turned round he saw that Friday was the first to nerve himself to help and stood behind him with a second basket of water. And when it was all over Friday fell on his knees before him and kissed the wet ground. "You are strong," said Friday. "You are strong."

That night the chiefs brought Halliday his supper. And sat within and without Friday's hut while Halliday alone ate. And when the moon rose Kono took him by the hand, led him out into the square, and pointed upwards, and knelt.

"O moon who walks up there," said Kono. "We are grateful to this man."

It was the day after that the hermit asked to see him. He lived unknown to Halliday in a hut in the scarlet binding flowers. It was Kono who took him to the hermit. But Kono waited outside the hut.

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The old man was not one of the chiefs. His duties to the diseased had long been forgotten, his obligations long dispensed with. He was the oldest man Halliday had ever seen. His hut was surrounded by the scarlet petals, the scarlet petals now rusting a little in the hot brown wind. Probably, thought Halliday, he is not as old as he looks, he looks a hundred and twenty.

“Cha nam Klo?” asked the hermit.

“England,” answered Halliday.

“England.”

“England. I am an Englishman.”

“I am an Englishman,” repeated the hermit. “Aie. Aie.” He took a flat stick from behind his back and in the most adroit fashion hit up a crude shuttle-cock of feathers that were stuck in a large berry into the air and kept hitting it there as he talked, stopping only to draw in the dust when he wished to emphasise a point or clear up a misunderstanding on Halliday’s part.

“I used to enjoy games of skill long ago,” the hermit said.

“Long ago?”

“Long ago. Before Manda. I was a great hunter.”

“You were not born in Manda?”

“I found it.”

“You like it here? You cannot hunt here?”

“I do not hunt here. I like it here. I die here.”

“Where did you come from?”

“We are the last. We are the oldest. Once we lived all over Africa. I look for Manda. Once long ago when some of us fell ill they were brought here into the water for comfort. Once there were many to tend and many to be tended. So is the story. I heard when I was a boy. I came to see.”

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“How long ago?”

“Long ago. Before my grandfather. Before his. Things have changed here.” And the old man smiled for the first time.

“Can you sweat?” said Halliday.

The old man simply smiled. “Things have changed here. It had to be so. It is in no man’s power to change the people’s fate here. They will die. We will all die. All that matters is the spirit. Leave us alone. I am very old and very beautiful. You go home. Home to England. Aie. Aie.”

Halliday stood up.

“It was long ago too late,” said the hermit.

“For what?”

“For us. I came here from my people”—he pointed South—“they may not hunt even those animals the white man does not eat. They say they look.”

“At the animals?”

“They only look at the animals. My people live in the past. They cannot hunt. They will die for ever. They wait. The white man gives them food. They lose their skill. I came North to see if my Grandfather’s story true. It is true but much changed. I die here also.”

And he did, this knowledgeable old man who had stuck the keys of two sardine cans in the lobes of his ears—he died before Halliday left Manda.

“From England?”

“From England. Aie. Aie. Go home.”

Another corpse, another chant, another gift to the sacred crocodiles.

A week later Halliday saw a ring of smoke. He called Friday, told him more medical supplies had arrived, asked

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his help to get them. It was easier to proceed now in the marshes; they found Abraham and Isaac without difficulty. Halliday was delighted at the supplies, delighted to see his men. Alejo wrote:

My dear Benjamin,

These are all the supplies and drugs I can spare. We are very short.

As a matter of fact I need you here badly. Diseases have sprung up like weeds in this drought.

But do not hurry anything. I have not of course been yet able to get you any authoritative information on the ectodermal dysplasia. I have written several letters and await the replies. I myself have heard of this complaint before. I believe there are negroes in Florida who suffer from it. And also certain aborigines in Australia. I believe Cilento in Australia has written a paper on these. I have written to him for his prognosis and described exactly the clinical features you gave me. I do not think myself there is much you can do for them.

As to the 'servants' as you call them, hypnosis might be the answer, but since you are inexperienced in that field I beg you to proceed warily. Surely the thing to do if you can is to persuade two or three of them to come to Katopos. Have you tried to do this?

One thing I am sure of is that they will require enormous love, patience and understanding. Their neurosis may go far deeper than one would at first suppose. However, you are on the spot and can judge this better than me.

But take care and take care of yourself. You are in a most unhealthy place. We are all vulnerable, are we not? I say this with a certain amount of humour.

Benjamin, I feel you may not be equipped to deal with these negroes all by yourself. Do not think I am doubting your ability but from what you say of the 'servants' the medicine you need is psychological, is it

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not? When I read your letter, particularly the 'poetic' bit, it made me feel curiously disturbed, as if you were saying that somehow or other in your little village there was almost nothing human which the problem did not somewhere touch. I am of course an over-imaginative old man as you know. And I cannot quite explain why your letter so much disturbed me. But it *did*.

What an extraordinary place it must be. I do understand your excitement. I would come and see for myself if I had the energies.

By the way. I remember once years ago in Lisbon a friend of mine who had studied with Freud in Vienna wrote to me in great excitement that he had at last cured a Professor of the belief the Professor had held for some years that he was a crab. We were all very pleased in Lisbon. Unfortunately my friend had to write to me again six months later that the Professor now believed himself to be a tortoise. As he explained to me very carefully at the time he had 'merely removed a symptom and the illness had found another'. He had not got to 'the heart of the disease'.

So in spite of the starving do not rush at the 'servants'. Don't forget that it has always been one of your weaknesses as a doctor that you crave the patient's affection. I don't mean that such a craving puts a doctor at a disadvantage in the ordinary way. On the contrary. But in such a case as this the craving may lead you into anticipating a situation before it exists and thereby creating it. Like certain lovers do, if you follow me. I think sometimes this craving of yours for affection from your patients derives from a mixture of pity for them and for yourself. Though God knows we do right to pity ourselves on occasion. Still you know, my dear, there are several kinds of pity and several kinds of love. The only kind of pity worth considering is the honest and imaginative kind that realises truly what it is about and will hold out patiently and kindly to its very limits and sometimes further than that. And this is true

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of the only love worth considering also. At least this is what I think.

I do not know exactly why I write these words to you, Ben, or altogether what I am implying. I know I do so partly because your letter seemed to lack objectivity. You will need all the objectivity you can command where you are. I am sure of that.

I am getting tired and muddled. It has been a heavy day. Syani sends her love.

I can only repeat myself: beware too much craving for affection. One of the characteristics of a strong man like you is persistence of motive. I have seen your motives display themselves often—more it would appear than you have seen them. I say again there are times in a doctor's life when he must carefully observe his motives.

You may think this a silly letter from an illogical old man. But something troubles me about all this.

I love you,
Alejo

P.S. 'It is blessed in any dawn to be alive.' I hope this saying makes you smile.

Halliday did smile in a tentative manner as he folded away the letter, but he was confused and surprised by it. Alejo had never attacked him on this count before. Was it true? Was it indeed that his whole life was dominated utterly by his desire for human affection? Thinking about it he began to see that perhaps it was. And he saw the implications. They were vast. Or vast for him. He suddenly felt cheerful and grinned: it is always interesting to find out something new about yourself, he thought. Something truly revealing. Was he a sort of Don Juan of the medical profession? He laughed out loud. So did Friday.

Halliday looked at Friday. Did he then want to cure the servants in Manda and raise their standard of living, keep

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them alive in fact, simply that they adore him? Was he such a possessive man? Perhaps he was. Was this the reward the most benevolent ruler demanded? Needed? But they *had* to be kept alive, hadn't they? He glanced again at Alejo's letter. 'It is blessed to be alive in any dawn.' It was Alejo's quotation. And for the second time he smiled at it. Then, "Adore me," he muttered sardonically. "Adore me, I am a saint."

Besides he had not hurried. He had been patient. It was an illogical letter. What did it really mean? You can't always have it both ways. There *are* positive occasions. Someone must rule. And someone present the idea—the germ of action.

He was still puzzled, however, still disconcerted. But as he took the supplies from Abraham and Isaac, loaded them into Friday's boat and said his goodbyes, he merely asked them to tell Doctor Gama that he would return to Katopos as soon as he could. And sooner or later he must define his own terms. He knew he was shrugging off an issue this morning but sometimes it was wrong to delay, wrong to compromise; the problem of life was to preserve the balance, and to preserve it sometimes one had to cut through the tight-rope, descend impulsively into the abyss, or leap clean across it. And everything must be specific—there must be no generalisations: each situation is unique. Halliday felt as tired as Alejo. And very sleepy. Nothing made any sense. He would sleep on Alejo's letter while Friday paddled him back to Manda. He would try to collect his thoughts. He wished he had the energy to do so now—now while the issue was at least part visible. But he fell asleep that morning, as they moved off together, he and the faithful Friday into the teeming wilderness of water and reeds, the narrower waterways now, red-

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brown waterways sometimes clogged with mud. He fell asleep and as he did so he thought to himself quite clearly and surely that some at least of his sentiment for the people of Manda was based upon an honest and unsentimental perception of what they might be if only they could come into their own. And that also in some ways he felt himself to have a surer perception of human love than the old Portuguese doctor had ever had.

But had he himself come into his own in terms of human love? In terms of what was possible? No. Not yet. Would he ever? Oh would he ever? And oh dear! He had forgotten to send his love to Syani. "Adore me for I am good," he muttered.

They went on towards Manda.

Another blazing day. He had almost used up the supplies Alejo had sent him; the work had been monotonously ugly. It had been unselfish work so that tonight his nerves and body were worn. He had been patient enough, he thought: cutting away the pus from the swollen genitals, injecting for yaws, lancing boils, anointing the craw-craw. Yes he had been patient, for it was, he considered, a hopeless fight in Manda—the fight against disease. That hypodermic had jabbed so rhythmically at those black bottoms; those tins of soothing cream and those pieces of lint could have covered the whole island; he had stitched their cuts and wounds like a sewing-machine. Hundreds of white pills had passed into their black hands. He had helped the boys most: much of the damage of the circumcisions at the puberty rites had been repaired or was on the mend. Yes, some of the results were already apparent but now his supplies had almost gone. There remained the problem: the true disease. He sat

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in the hut watching the men and women preparing for the night. The water dripped from the baskets. Under the floor the rats moved sedately—two or three scampered along the roof above his head. He had endeavoured as he had worked to become friends, and he had succeeded. But none of them could be persuaded to return with him to Katopos. He had shown them how *he* sweated—they merely thought him unique. They used him commonsensically, as they were used themselves. So he sat there above the rats and below the rats, thinking. 'Hypnosis', Alejo had written. Whom could he hypnotise? A lame girl, who loved him. If one sweated would all sweat? 'Progress is made by the few,' said the Golden Bough. "I can't go on," he had said to Friday. "There are no more supplies." The girl loved him and that, he thought, is generally a help. She was already hypnotised. He turned to watch Kamante.

There were so many emotions and images that were hard to call on in an African hut full of black buttocks, black teats, and snoring black men; he had an irresistible longing for the familiar: for Cornwall and the high hedges and the flowers and the scent, for the clean seas of the North. But he watched Kamante all the same.

She was to the villagers the least attractive. But not to him. The maturer village beauties had swollen buttocks and coated whitened breasts that hung flat, and pouched to their waists. They made him think of the brevity of attractive nakedness in any human life. How long in a woman? How long in a man? What about himself? He undid the top buttons of his shirt. He rubbed the palm of his hand against his chest. Firm enough there.

But she, Kamante, was clean. And her thighs were firm. And her breasts also. And slightly horn-shaped.

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She had good breasts. And her little head was heart-shaped. There was a sudden flow of blood in him—something like falling rain.

Yet he controlled himself. She sat on the floor of the hut squeezing the leaves of a marsh-plant, pounding them slowly into a carved wooden bowl, into a blue dye. The dye lightened those black hands.

Did the ethical rules of his profession apply in Manda? He didn't care if they did. He was not a dishonest man. And he had never had any sense of sexual guilt. He disliked guilt. He did not believe in guilt. As to love, of course, it was just that he had never found it. That was what he thought. How could he have found it? Where had he lived all these years? How could it have been otherwise?

Besides, he thought then in that hut, who does have it? Who has had it? And who is capable of it! Human love. Profound love. Who had such luck? Who has such depth?

He rubbed his chest again; he was sweating. Two rats fell together off the roof. But if only some day somewhere...

Perhaps he could go through some ceremony—marry the lame girl: he laughed. She looked across at him and smiled. They were the only two awake. He didn't stop smiling. His humour was peculiarly his own at moments like these—a truthful humour. And he was proposing to commit an act for which he could be struck off the register—if anybody, any official, had been there to observe of course. And he didn't believe in God!

But then he stopped being humorous: he had realised conclusively that if he were to attack the problem it was the smiling little black girl whom he must use. And she must be used. There was now no other way. The problem—the situation—was larger than . . . larger than her. But was it? Is it ever?

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He made up his mind but certain fragmentary thoughts hung on him, pressed him back. He had slept with several women in his youth, and his housekeeper Syani in Katopos, but he was not a promiscuous man. In some ways he could be described as sexually fastidious. "Oh Christ," he said. "The end and the means. That's the real point. Am I justified? Never mind about *me*."

Did he like the girl enough? Yes. He had never slept with a woman he had not liked—never casually and never only once.

Was it just to use her? Was it? He paused and thought. The girl put down the wooden bowl and came to bed. She touched him as she passed.

What were the customs of the village in these matters? Should he wake up Friday? Ask the father's permission to spend the night with his daughter? The permission had already been granted—or so he inferred. The act was wished for. Friday longed for him to become part of the family.

Kamante lay down, put her hand in his. But he still thought. He thought about it from his several points of view—and he had a pretty good clinical knowledge of the physiological impulses of the human body. Of course she was so much younger for her age than the rest of the marsh-women of Manda. They became old so quickly: lack of food, disease, frequent child-bearing. "Oh Jesus. Was he justified or not?"

He looked at her, then for the last time that evening he looked away from her through the door of the hut into the darkness. Once again the blood flowed in him like falling rain. And rose too: and kept rising. It was those slim thighs and that heart-shaped little head.

In the darkness the village huts were as black as the

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negroes. The water to the North of the island lay flat and heavy but from the water a pink light welled, touching the grass, the trees, and the scarlet binding flowers, seeming to have no source this light, for the sun had long set; and yet divided by a line as thin as a hair from the water it welled from. It would be such a relief. All fears, all conscience, went; purpose and desire burst in on him like a deep breath. He stood up, pulled her with him. They moved out from the snoring hut into the night. No moon. Only the pink light persisted. They walked towards it.

She could see better than Halliday and was leading. She led him round a yellow ant tenement twelve feet high above their heads. Perhaps, he thought, these are the real owners of Africa. He could hear the ants: still at work, or loving, like the rats. They walked far from the village, along the water's edge.

On the highest bank—by the scarlet flowers—so much softer than the grass, Kamante stopped. She cried out. She flung herself into his arms. He was disconcerted: he had a glimpse of responsibility. But she hugged him so tightly that he forgot. Tighter and tighter. He couldn't understand where she got such strength. He was no longer alone in Manda.

And then he too grew strong and began to rub the palms of his hands slowly against her back. He felt how young and slender she was. He felt her so he knew her. She kept whispering against his mouth but they weren't words. Her face burned against his.

He lifted her onto him. Consciously. Very gently. Once again something in him questioned his right. He turned and fell with her into the soft flowers.

He loved her as well as he could, gently and containedly, and thoughtfully; he did not intend to have a

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child in Manda. And whether Kamante knew he was holding something of himself back or not, she gave no sign for she was happy. And he was her first lover: Doctor Halliday, Doctor Benjamin Halliday. She had felt no pain.

They slept. They woke. They loved each other again. And now he was almost as happy as she. This time they loved each other more sensually. She had learned something of that already. And she was wet now, having covered herself with the river water.

Before they left in the early dawn about four o'clock they stood there looking at each other, brushing off the leaves from his shirt, and out of her hair. In their own ways they both felt they knew that place and knew those crushed flowers and leaves. The sighing dawn wind touched their cheeks. Why not? Yes, in their different ways each of these people felt a sense of gratitude and peace; everything reached out towards them.

When they turned to move off towards Manda Halliday picked two of the scarlet flowers and rubbed the dew from them on to her face. Then he gave *her* one of the flowers but the other he kept and crushed tightly, crushed so tightly in his own hand. He knew in his heart he would never sleep with Kamante again.

*“The wind comes and says, ‘the rain is on the way’,
My heart cries in the wind and says ‘I am alone’.”*

That was Kamante's poem.

As soon as they re-entered the dry trodden square Halliday signified to Kamante to return to her hut to sleep. “Sleep,” he said. “Even lovers sleep.” “Will you come?” “Not yet.” He kissed her and she left him. He frowned: she wanted him to go with her. He looked up. Once again

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the birds flying overhead were the colours of the sky. Behind him the drying pool bubbled. Already zigzagging insects bumped into his face still damp with the dew and droned monotonously in his ears. He walked to a bush to rub some of the dew off the leaves on to his forehead. It was still early. He would have liked a hot bath. His loins rubbed unpleasantly against his trousers. He felt exhausted, sweaty, and restless. He felt disquieted. He felt as if he had been at some all night debauch. He wanted to catch a train and get back immediately to the privacy of his own bed, to lie in clean sheets. He did not feel proud now. He sat down on a rock and started to oil his rifle. He could not have said when his intention had formed itself clearly but he knew exactly what he was going to do. He was trying to calm himself. His hands shook. He would have given anything for a cigarette. In the clear serene light everything seemed to be waking up, even the rock he sat on. And he had the sensation that everything was waking up gracelessly—like some women he had known. It was a trick nature was playing on him. He felt apart from everything, detached, impersonal and cruel. He kept relating everything about him to women—to women when they wake unattractively—when they wake up frowsy and crumpled and . . . and graceless. Everything looked ugly and stupid this morning as it woke up.

Halliday had made up his mind: only the enactment mattered. He stood up. He grinned derisively about him. He set off towards the river bank at the opposite end of the island from where he had been with Kamante. Not that he could get away from the flowers: the scarlet flowers were all over Manda. He reached the water. He stood by the water's edge very conscious of his own body. He smelled his hands. Such a mixture! *That* and the rifle oil.

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Careless of the sacred crocodiles, the leeches and the bilharzia, he clambered down into the water. He washed himself where the water flowed fastest, flowed cleanest. He rubbed the water hard against his thighs with the palms of his hands. He would not have minded a leech or two. He was still sweating when he came out of the river. He whistled tunelessly as he dressed. He was trying to shut something out. He kept thinking of people he disliked. And what they thought of him. He seemed to dislike almost everyone this morning. Particularly negroes. Particularly negroes. Jesus Christ, he hoped he was right!

In the dawn sky thousands of wings beat over Manda. Like moving stars speckled formations of marsh birds headed for the wide lagoons and the lakes to sleep during the day.

*“The wind was once a man
Who wandered on the earth,
Now he is a bird who flies high.”*

Once again he questioned his intention.

The bird stars grew thicker in the sky, wheeled and slipped to avoid each other, cried out in affection, or derision, passed on knowledge. Oh those bird stars!

*“The wind-bird seeks food,
The wind-bird hunts,
When it has eaten its prey
It flies home again.”*

He looked back at Manda. Yes, he knew their poems now. “The wind-bird seeks food.” Food of love perhaps. And then he was impelled.

Halliday raised his rifle and shot four times into one of the formations of wild ducks: two dead birds plummeted

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into the scarlet flowers twenty paces from where he stood. In the sky and in Manda there was the expected reaction.

He walked over to the duck, picked them up, reloaded his rifle. He picked them up by their webbed feet and shook their dead heads on the ends of their limp necks. There was blood in their eyes. He did not care. His nerves were over-tensed. The act of love had not relaxed him—on the contrary. “Supposing she was my fiancée,” he said aloud. His thoughts gave a jerk; he set off towards Manda, clenching his hands on the legs of the duck and on the rifle, walking faster and faster, quite joyless, telling himself not to be a fool, pins and needles in his elbows.

As he reached Manda he saw that he had been wrong about the villagers' reaction when he had fired his rifle and shot the duck; no-one had heard him, they were all asleep—the noise had been entirely the birds. Besides, the wind blew in his face. He had time on hand. Once again fragments of poems passed to and fro through his brain. In the square he began to heap leaves and dead branches by the silage bin—anything that would burn. As he went into the bush outside the village he was conscious of an aversion to women working unmercifully inside him, as if a score of insects had spirited themselves into his stomach and had begun to gnaw. Occasionally they laid their heads on one side and paused, but a moment later they were silently boring again. They left empty spaces behind them he was sure.

The pile grew. He was terribly hungry and thought that when he had eaten he might relax. He tore a leaf off a suitable tree and chewed it as he worked; he almost vomited. He felt that if only he could keep this leaf down it would have some reassuring effect in spite of all. It was simply a matter of forcing the chewed leaf to remain

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down there. He began a second and larger pile of wood so that he could add to the first when the first was lit. His unpleasant thoughts and the poetic fragments seemed to be inextricably bound up. Silence: not a black soul awake yet! In the light that was still so clear and so serene the whole landscape advanced upon him: all the surrounding objects, the trees, the huts, the rocks, the islands of grass and reeds had come to be spectators. There seemed some extra clarity of light this morning! Yes, although the people were still asleep he was already surrounded by a vast and interested audience.

He had finished the piles. He sat down between them to pluck the dead birds, throwing the damp bedraggled feathers to the hot wind. The duck had been beautiful an hour ago! There was such a mixture on his fingers: he did not resist smelling them in the most sensual fashion. Why should I resist? he thought. What hypocrites we are. 'Show me an honest man.'

His fingers throbbed. The surrounding objects drew even nearer, and he now had a painful sensation as if the voracious insects within him were creeping up from his spleen to gnaw at his heart. They did gnaw at his heart: it brought tears to his eyes. He brushed them away and started to clean the duck with his scalpel. Perhaps he should cook them like English snipe—guts and all.

With the coming of the sun the wind dropped and some of the landscape retreated to its accustomed place. And some of the dead feathers remained in the square. The first risers—a woman and child—descended from their hut to urinate together in the bushes. It was only when they had finished that they saw Halliday cleaning the duck. As they stared he pulled his rifle close and felt a calm descend on him: his hands stopped shaking; his

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thoughts grew bearable. Grasping her child tightly by the hand the woman clambered back into her hut to wake her husband. Halliday took a stick, drew a circle in the square around the piles, around the silage bin—a large circle. He drew it firmly as they watched, holding on to his rifle with his free hand. When he had finished he pointed at the circle—the watchers seemed to understand its purpose. Almost everyone was watching: he raised his rifle: no-one entered the circle. “Do not cross the circle,” Halliday shouted.

Silence. All the chiefs had arrived. He was becoming increasingly hungry; he wanted particularly to taste flesh. He spitted the duck on a branch with his back to the silage bin. “Do not harm me, Kono,” said Halliday, “or I shall use the noise-stick.” Silence. Sweat was breaking out on his forehead again. He saw Kono was trembling. Then Kono was sick. Kono squatted on his haunches in the dust. They all did, even the children. Halliday took his box of matches out of his pocket—unwrapped the little water-proofed bag. He felt the points of the matches—the points were hard, were strikeable. Silence. Again a refrain jogged itself in his head—again that lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias divided the air. Oh dear Alejo, what would you think of this?

*“Now the dove and the leopard wrestle
At five in the afternoon.”*

It was then that Friday descended from his hut rubbing his eyes, looked about him appalled, pushed his way through the squatting throng to Kono’s side. “Good morning, Friday,” said Halliday. “What are you doing?” said Friday. “What are you doing?” And in that dawn as pink as so many dawns in Manda, Halliday stood up to his

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full height and clearly and distinctly in the people's own tongue began to explain—pausing to gesture when at a loss for a word or a phrase, repeating himself often, so that all should understand.

"I am going to light a fire with these." He held up the matches. "These are fire-sticks. No-one is to enter the circle or I shall use the noise-stick. The noise-stick can kill you as you saw it kill the birds. If anyone tries to harm me the noise-stick will kill them. No-one will be hurt by the fire I shall light. I shall keep it here. I am master of the fire." He pointed at the piles. "The fire will not leave here."

"Leave us in peace," moaned Friday.

"We are happy," screamed Kono.

"We are happy, we are happy," moaned the chiefs.

"I shan't hurt you," said Halliday, covered in sweat again. "I shall light a fire and the fire won't hurt. You stay where you are and watch. You are safe where you are. I shall sit by the fire and sweat. Dsao will not make me ill. I shan't die. I shall burn the flesh of these duck I have killed with the noise-stick and then will eat them. That is how we eat in my country. It makes us big and strong. Like me. Outside this island, outside this swamp, are many people and all these people eat like this and are big and strong and don't fear to sweat. It is only your chiefs who can't sweat. The rest of you are like me. Just like me. You Friday are just like me and when you see this you must leave this place and come with me to my country."

"We are happy," cried Friday. "Leave us."

"You are dying here," said Halliday. "You are starving here. You must come with me to my country and I will look after you all. You will not starve in my country."

"Leave us," cried Friday.

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“This is our home,” cried Kono.

“We are happy,” moaned the chiefs.

It crossed Halliday’s mind that whatever the outcome the chiefs would have to remain here for a time; they would never survive the journey back to Katopos without infinite attention and care. It would need a whole medical caravan to get them safely to Katopos. One day then they must have that caravan. But not yet. It could not be yet. But when, when? He dismissed the question for the moment; he knelt by the smaller pile and lit the first match.

“We cannot leave them,” cried Friday. “They are ours!”

At the sight of the flame in Halliday’s cupped hands the people sighed but did not move. The wind blew out the flame. Halliday lifted his head and smiled. “The wind has blown it out,” he said. “I’ll try again. I have lots of matches.” The people sighed. The little boys stood on tip-toe. Several of the girls began to giggle. “It’s kind this flame. In the South your people love this flame, at nights it keeps them warm.” He lit a second match. He held the flame at the dried leaves, the leaves caught, the fire was lit. As the flames soared many took to the water; some stood where they were but whimpered like dogs. Halliday jabbed the branch of spitted duck into the wall of the silage bin above the fire. The flames licked around the dead birds so that in a moment the people had their first smell of roasting flesh. The juice dropped and sizzled: in the old men old instincts were awakened and they wetted their lips. The heat was such that Halliday threw off his rotting shirt. “You can all sweat,” he said pleasantly. “All but the chiefs. It’s not their fault they can’t sweat. They are sick. There is an injury when they are little. But to you, the

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servants, no harm will come if you sit by the fire. If one of you will come he can show this. One of you can be the first and show it, Who will come?"

No-one answered or moved.

"Who will come? Who is brave?"

"He is the Death Spirit," cried Kono. "He is Dsao."

"Friday," said Halliday. "Trust me. I saved your life. I have healed your people. Trust me."

"If what you say is true," said Friday slowly, "if it is true, if we go to your country what will happen to the chiefs? Can you make them well there?"

"No," said Halliday. And immediately wished he had lied.

"The journey would be hard for the chiefs."

"Yes," said Halliday.

"Too hard."

"Yes," said Halliday.

"They would die on the journey."

"Perhaps," said Halliday.

"This is their place," said Friday. "I am their servant. I stay to the end."

"Friday," said Halliday. "We will take the chiefs. We will move slowly. In Katopos where I live we will look after the chiefs. We cannot cure them but we will look after them. You can stay with them always."

"I must," said Friday.

"And in Katopos the servants will grow well and work and prosper and the children will live. And all can look after the chiefs as they do now."

"In another country," said Friday, even slower, even graver than before, "they may not. If they prosper they may not. In another country they may leave the chiefs. These are our chiefs. These are *ours*."

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“I know that,” said Halliday.

“We must stay. All must stay together. This is our home. In a different country some may leave the chiefs.”

“But you are starving,” said Halliday. “Soon you will all die in Manda. You cannot go on. In my country others can look after the chiefs.”

“Others!” shouted Friday fiercely. Friday drew himself up and fiercely and proudly and contemptuously shouted again at Halliday. “Others!”

Silence. Halliday was pale. He too felt sick. And now a gust of wind whirled into the square and blew a cloud of smoke directly at the chiefs so that they ran fearfully towards the pool coughing and choking. “He is the Death Spirit,” screamed Kono, vomiting again. “He is Dsao. He is the medicine man. The Witch Doctor. He is the white Witch Doctor.” And several in the little crowd took up the cry to mutter: “He is the white Witch Doctor. He is the white Witch Doctor.” “It’s only smoke,” said Halliday numbly. “It doesn’t harm.” But he was depressed at this sudden trick of the wind—the wind was not helping him.

“Leave us,” said Friday.

“I cannot.”

Halliday moved wearily to turn the branch in the wall, to turn the spitted duck. Halliday heaped more leaves and branches onto the fire.

“I am strong,” cried Friday. “They are weak.”

“You know who will come to the fire?”

“She sleeps,” cried Friday.

“I will wake her.”

“No. Do not.”

“I will wake her.”

So Friday shouted out in anger, clenched his fists and ran at Halliday: Halliday fired his rifle into the air.

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Friday hesitated, stopped, knowing the sound must have woken his daughter. As the children began to scream he turned and went to the water's edge to comfort them. He looked at Halliday so sadly as he splashed the children with water. And now Kamante came out of the hut and stood still when she saw the fire. "I have lit a fire," said Halliday. "It will not harm you. Come to me." She stood still. "Will it hurt?" asked Kamante. "No," said Halliday, smiling at her. "I'll never hurt you. All that will happen is you will sit by the fire and sweat."

"I want to be like you," whispered Kamante.

"Come on then."

"I need not touch the fire?"

"Just come and sit."

But she did not move. And Halliday was forced to leave the fire and go over to her holding his rifle. Surprisingly to him nobody attempted to interfere—this was 'his woman' and with her he could do as he wished—or as she wished. Kamante was trembling. He kissed her. He took her hand. "Come on."

"He will kill you," moaned Kono.

"He will kill you," screamed the chiefs.

"He would not hurt me, Father," whispered Kamante.

"Last night the moon lost its belly," cried Kono. "She will die."

"Last night the moon lost its belly," muttered the servants. "Last night . . . last night . . ." Kamante smiled. "I saw the moon," said Kamante. Halliday kissed the girl again and led her towards the fire, talking comfortingly all the time. He was gauging his strength. She had stopped smiling and was trembling again. Her lips had blued. He was aware such a child could die of fright. Thirty paces from the fire he sat her down on the ground

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beside him. He could not, would not, must not, push her too far or too fast.

*“The sweat of snow was coming
At five in the afternoon,”* murmured Halliday

As he talked to her he sometimes relapsed into English. “I’m the strongest,” he was saying. “Don’t worry. I love you too, so don’t worry. None of them here will hurt you. I won’t let them. They’re frightened of the rifle. You’ve gone beyond them already. If you stay with me they’ll catch you up. You don’t have to touch the fire. You just have to sit by it.” Once or twice now he felt his concentration going, and that he was talking to some idiot: he could have screamed like Kono; he could have vomited like Kono. Then again he felt he was acting out some part and only continuing to perform for the sake of the audience. He pulled himself together as best he could. “I’ll tell you about the country I was born in, Kamante. It is called England. I was born in Cornwall. Cornwall is at the end of England. The South West end. We don’t live in huts there because it’s too cold. We live in houses made of stone. It would be easier for the chiefs there. It’s not all that often we sweat there. Not in England. The people live in cities mostly—lots of houses—stone houses—all together—shut in. Not so many birds. Different birds in England.”

“Birds.”

“Yes, the birds there are quieter—not so big. Not so bright. But they sing as well.” He could not at all understand why he felt so exhausted. Was a fever coming on? It could not entirely be the night and his lack of food. He had to make an enormous conscious effort to keep the conversation simple, keep the gentleness in his voice. Perhaps it was

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just the poverty of the marsh diet . . . perhaps it was doubt . . . perhaps . . . "Birds. English birds. Thrushes, sparrows, starlings. And the sea-birds. I like the sea-birds best of all. In the cities the birds . . . I mean the people are different. The people keep staring at their feet as they walk. And they bury their dead in coffins—wooden boxes. And keep them longer than you do in Manda. Some have got the sense to be burned. And some have no time to be buried. Sometimes they kill each other deliberately. A lot of them are ill too. Mentally ill. Surprising how many." He realised how tightly he was gripping her fingers. He must be gentle with the child. He must. It didn't matter at all what he said. He must relax her. He must communicate love. Be simple, he told himself again. Concentrate and be real. Look at the girl and love her if only for now. But when he came to think of it, what kind of a world was he trying to lead them to?

And then, as had happened before and was to happen again, the depression and the giddiness suddenly passed, suddenly lifted like a veil, and he was confident again, and could relax, and could look at her, and thought his actions to be absolutely necessary and right. Yes, some fundamental characteristic, or belief, perhaps an unconscious one, seemed to re-assert itself. The depression passed like a headache or a bad dream. Halliday smiled at Kamante. She saw the change. She saw the warmth in the eyes. "Sometimes in those stone houses—I'll take you there one day." "Yes?" "Yes. One day. Sometimes it's so cold in those stone houses we sit all day in front of a fire like this and what we call snow falls down. It's white this snow and falls like rain, but it falls in flakes and the flakes are bigger than rain drops and soft as feathers and cover the ground like feathers or the petals of flowers." "Like locusts?"

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“Yes. Like locusts. But the snow is white even in the cities and does no harm and is very beautiful. Like you are Kamante. Then the sun comes and it melts. As you can melt. By the fire.” Halliday kissed Kamante on top of her frizzy heart-shaped head. He picked her up in his arms and carried her closer to the fire. He could not tell how afraid she was. Perhaps now not at all: she had stopped trembling. They sat again. On the spit the wild ducks were sizzling—an unaccustomed healthy smell, a delicious smell. They sat together and watched the fire. As he had expected when he turned round he saw that no-one else had moved.

The sun had begun to climb, he was looking directly into her eyes, the duck were almost cooked. “Come on,” he said, “we’ll move closer again.” Kamante made no protest. But this time they moved close enough to feel for the first time the direct heat of the flames: again she trembled. “Trust me sweetheart,” said Halliday. “I’ll tell you another story in a minute. They’re all watching you so don’t turn round. Look at me. I’m covered in sweat. Fecl.” He rubbed her hand up and down on his chest. “Love me that’s all.” And then in English but still smiling tenderly and cheerfully. “One day we’ll find you someone else, but love me now. That’s all I ask.”

Silence. He moved her closer. Moaning swelled from the pool. Halliday looked back: Friday was impassive—fatalistic now. A curious little boy emerged from the pool and stood on the edge beside Friday to see better; the mother pulled her child back into the water, slapped him hard; the boy shouted out in protest.

At last Halliday was beginning to enjoy the scene and to be confident of success. Whatever had so troubled him he had certainly shaken it off: there was even less need to

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hurry. "Once upon a time Kamante there was a little boy called Hansel and a little girl called Gretel."

"Hansel and Gretel?"

"Yes. They got lost in the woods, these children, and since it was winter time and the white snow I told you about was falling on them, they both felt very cold and hungry. In those woods lived an evil old woman—a witch."

"A white witch?"

"Yes. She looked like one of the chiefs but she was much more evil than they and not ill. They saw the light shining in her house."

"Hansel and Gretel?"

"Yes. They saw the light shining in her house and went and knocked on the door. 'Can we come in?' they said." He hugged Kamante. "Now we're going to go and sit right close to the fire. It won't hurt you. You can sweat just as well as me. And the sun will warm you too. It's not your enemy. It's your friend."

"I'm frightened," said Kamante. "I don't want to go nearer. I don't."

"Sh," said Halliday. "I love you. There's no harm."

"I'm frightened," said Kamante.

"Leave us," cried Friday from the pool. "They are so weak."

"He is the Death Spirit," cried the chiefs.

"Kamante," said Halliday. "There's no hurry. Drink this, it will make you very brave." He took out his brandy flask.

"Drink it?"

"Yes. It will make you very brave." The girl looked at Halliday. She took the flask, she drank. She coughed.

"Drink again," said Halliday.

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He did not hurry Kamante, he went on talking. "What happened to the children?" asked Kamante. He told her. He kept her drinking the brandy. He moved her closer to the fire. "So they lived happily ever after," said Kamante. "They did." "Tell me it again." He told her it again.

The sun was quarter high overhead. He saw the first sweat begin to appear on the little negress. He did not point it out. He waited. "Tell me about Hansel and Gretel again." He told her again.

She was drunk and so was he—but he was not drunk with the brandy. She was covered in sweat. He couldn't contain himself any longer. He gave a great cry of joy and picked her up in his arms and hugged her to him. And the boys he had helped most were the first to come out of the water to see for themselves. And they stood pointing and gesticulating at the edge of the circle. And Halliday took the spit and the roasted duck and threw this boy his first piece of cooked fish. And the boy caught it and tasted it. And Halliday cried out again like a child. Cried out and cried out. "The world can be so good," he cried. "I've shown them. I've shown them." And again he kissed Kamante. And if he could he would have kissed them all.

But even at this triumphant moment he was troubled to see that Friday remained with Kono, remained at the edge of the pool. Friday looked numbly across the square at Halliday as if Halliday had committed some unforgivable crime.

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♦ 2 ♦

ON a Wednesday evening in January nineteen hundred and fifty nine it was still snowing in London. Halliday thought he bumped into someone he once knew as he crossed the road and called out but the woman didn't stop. He had taken a taxi to Moss Brothers from Regent's Park but couldn't have said why, except that he had been to Moss Brothers the day before. He had gone into several pubs in that area during the last hour and a half but had found no-one whatsoever to like. Everyone here was over-weight, moronic, pasty-faced, unpleasant, smug and noisy. Their voices grated horribly on him. And in the streets the drivers seemed intent on knocking him down. He kept remembering the tame ducks on the lake in Regent's Park and that when he had walked through Trafalgar Square and had shouted at the pigeons none of them had bothered to fly off. He didn't think he'd ever seen so many ugly people. He didn't think there was a people as ugly as his own, in London, in the winter. He went into another pub. It was next to a theatre. Inside were a lot of mirrors. The customers kept glancing into these large mirrors as they talked and constantly towards the doors to see the new arrivals. Everyone here knew and greeted one another with apparent and uninhibited affection. But no-one here listened to anyone else's conversation.

He drank a large brandy. Then another. He was interested by a group of young men who were holding court, buying each other drinks—but nobody else—and drinking these drinks as fast as he was himself. He edged over. "The way of longing remains," said one. He thought

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that very true. "Brand's the only play I've ever seen where it didn't matter about the actors," said another. "Bloody awful production though." "Wasn't it!" Everyone agreed it was a bloody awful production. There was a row behind him. "Oh bugger off." "Bugger off yourself." "Get out of my life." "Get out of *my* life!" A nervous man in a dinner jacket rushed into the public house: "Come on, boys, for Christ's sake." Reluctantly they downed their drinks and left. Halliday followed. He followed them down the alley-way and saw that they went into the stage-door of the theatre. He turned back, paused, and then went into the front of the theatre. Ten minutes later the curtain rose on the first play he had seen for twenty-six years—the last time he had been to a theatre he had taken Frances Irving.

On the stage the young men were dressed in the uniform of the British Army; none were officers. At first he found it difficult to understand what was being said, but as he realised what the play was about he grew morbid. When a young soldier refused to stick a bayonet in the Japanese prisoner, and several people around him laughed, he wanted to cry out at these people but desisted because he felt he didn't have the right. Besides, he was supposed to be in a civilised country. By the end of the play when the boys were shot, tears were streaming down his face because he simply couldn't bear such a palpable illustration of war's futility and the dilemma of its victims. Yet he told himself ironically that since he was so affected he couldn't have entirely dried up. And he sat in his seat long after the rest of the audience had left—hearing the cries of the dying.

When he re-entered the pub the actors were already there, drinking as fast as before, and seemingly quite unconcerned with what they had just done to him. At first he wanted

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to rebuke them for their gaiety, but then rebuked himself for being naïve. He drank some more brandy. A young girl bumped into him as she pushed by to join the group. A tiny girl, and smart, with her hair cut short in a fringe. "I am so sorry," she said in a cool voice. It was Frances Irving's voice! English upper class—genuine—not affected, not flat. It was Frances Irving—just as she had been. The only time he had been happy with Frances in that love affair at Guy's, and then not always, was when they were together in bed. "Let's go to a party," he heard her say. The actors instantly agreed. Halliday followed them once again as they hurried out into the street to get taxis. By the time he had got one for himself they had disappeared in theirs but he remembered the address the girl had given: "75 Blomfield Terrace, just off the King's Road."

When he reached Blomfield Terrace and pushed into the crowded basement to talk to Frances he saw after a while that either he had not heard correctly, or the actors had changed their minds and gone somewhere else. In one room he paused by a trestle table heaped with bottles of cheap red wine and drank. They were dancing in this room. Nobody had spoken to him from the time he had entered the house. Nobody was interested in him. He saw he was the only old man there. In this room they were dancing. The girls were dead white and heavily mascaraed. They had long hair and even longer jerseys. Some seemed to have breasts as big as mother negresses. He watched and drank for a while but still no-one spoke to him so he left this room and went to another. A negro was singing on the gramophone. You didn't have to wind this gramophone up. Some of the young people were listening to the negro. Some were not. In the corners and in the shadows

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young people were lying together. Except for the boy changing records he saw that everyone in this room was as drunk as he. Perhaps the boy was paid to change the records.

Since he had to speak to someone and since there was a thin red-haired girl lying alone on a bed he went and sat beside her. "At least I've done something with my life," he said aggressively. "Don't you like these people?" "I don't expect you to answer me," he said. "If you're going to talk to me I'm going to talk back." "Yes," he said. "Quite right." He offered her some of the red wine he was carrying. "A doctor *can* have a good life," he said. "That's all one needs . . . to do good. He's lucky it's so tangible." "Are *you* a doctor then?" asked the girl. "I used to be," he said. "I've given it up." "You keep staring at me." "Your hair's the same colour as mine . . . exactly the same. How long is it?" "I can sit on it. But what do you do now?" "Nothing," said Halliday. "I'm looking for something to do. Have you any ideas?" "I don't know," said the girl. "I don't know even for myself. I haven't worked for ages." "Since we're human," said Halliday "we can only think about things in a very small way, can't we?" "I'm always making mistakes," said the girl. "That's exactly it," he said. "Christ," said the girl, "you're as miserable as I am." "I can't stand it here," he said. "Neither can I," she agreed, then looking at him directly: "Let's go somewhere else." As they climbed up the basement steps she suddenly paused, clutched his arm and implored: "I'm so drunk. Be kind to me, won't you?"

They had been in two or three places but everything was closed now and he was seated in a taxi again with her head resting on his arm. He had made her laugh several times. Twice she remarked how much she liked him and

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how he cheered her up. He glanced down, perhaps she was asleep. She had given the taxi driver an address somewhere in Earl's Court. "Well, I don't know about faith," he said heavily. "When we do know about it what will it matter?" Seven negroes stood at the corner of the King's Road: he blinked his eyes—another illusion. Kamante pulled on his arm. "Besides, whatever you do the faith or the truth won't be affected, will it?" "No," said the red-haired girl sleepily. Sleepily and drunkenly. "Of course I am dealing . . . I have been dealing . . . with small things . . . with individual lives . . . is there another cataclysm coming?" "Don't worry any more." She squeezed his arm again. "Think about me." "Yes," he said, "I do. I do think about you, but we are all under an obligation to save what we can—ourselves and those others we can. Save the children . . . bring them through . . . do what one can—always. So that there will be men and women as once there were. And sometimes as *we* were." "Save *me*," whispered the red-haired girl, snuggling even closer. He didn't suppose there were any scars on her white thighs.

As he climbed the narrow stairs in the old house somewhere in Earl's Court he realised his mood had changed again and that now he felt no tenderness towards his companion. He did not know why this was so. And yet he was determined to go through with the encounter. They had both taken off their shoes. When were they going to end, these stairs? He felt breathless already. He swayed. "You're saving me from a fate worse than death," he said, grinning malevolently at her back. "Sh," said the girl, putting one of her fingers on to her lips and smiling at him. He knew he ought to feel grateful to her but he didn't. She seemed thinner than ever. Christ, he felt so bloody old. What was all this? The change of life? The dangerous age.

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And hadn't he been here before? With her mother, or something.

At the very top of the house they went into a tiny room. "I won't be a moment," whispered the girl. She left him and he heard her running water in the bathroom next door. He had seen someone's underwear hanging on a line over the bath as they passed. He'd only seen such underwear in advertisements. He tried to find a coin for the gas fire but he didn't have any: it was so cold. And wasn't it she that had paid for the taxi? He'd been humiliated by that. He must give her the money back. Somehow he managed to take off his clothes. He found it very difficult to get off his trousers. He crawled into the narrow bed.

The girl came into the room. "You're back," he said and pulled her down beside him. Somehow they got together into that narrow bed. She still had her shirt and jersey on, but that was all. Christ he was so old. They were both shivering.

He began straight away. He'd never known anyone so thin. He could have held this body entirely in his hands. How old was she?

He hardly noticed her. He was only concerned with his own satisfaction. And she was completely silent throughout the whole process. And dry. He felt so ashamed.

He couldn't move. He lay with his whole weight on the girl. He knew it must be too much. He struggled to get up and dress.

"Don't go," she said. "Please don't go. Stay with me for a little." He couldn't grant her even that.

"I have to go," he said. "I have to."

"I'm so sorry," he said. "I'm so sorry."

He pulled on his shirt and his morning clothes. He couldn't find his socks so he put his shoes on his bare feet.

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He walked out of the room. "I'll see you again," he said at the door. He didn't know if he meant it or not.

The girl had started silently to cry. She'd covered her face with her hands. "It's all so pointless," he heard her say.

"You'll be all right," he said. "Someone'll look after you. Oh Christ, don't cry. *Don't* cry."

She turned over and buried her face in the pillow. "Don't worry," she said. "Don't worry about me."

He shut the door and staggered down the long stairs—anything to get out of that house. It had not at all been what he'd hoped for. Sometime he must come back and do something—something to help this girl. Also, he realised he was not unique: this scene had been enacted a million times before.



IT was the day of departure from Manda. He had always hated departures and goodbyes, had always got them over as quickly and as unemotionally as possible. Memories of railway stations, memories of his school cap. "Don't kiss me in front of the other boys, Mother." "I wouldn't dream of it," she said. But he was prouder of her than the other boys were of theirs. She was better looking than theirs. Some boys had awful mothers!

It was a dry sunny day, but above their heads clouds had begun to pass more often. All shapes of clouds, but still light clouds. Their reflections sauntered peacefully over the dwindling pool. They were leisurely frail clouds, and yet he was sure could he peer down over the horizon line

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as if peering over a wall or a cliff, he would have seen huge inky black clouds massing their assault down there. Yes, those above were the fore-runners, the scouts, and in Manda the light was still so strong that everything around him lost its colour and kept no more than a pale silhouette that trembled like himself in the heat.

Halliday looked down from the clouds at his sad speechless friend. Friday drew an oblong in the dust. "But we want to go there," said Halliday, pointing South West, pointing to Katopos. Halliday looked at the little compass in his hand. "There," he said, and pointed again. Friday shook his head. Friday looked at the small crowd. They had gathered in the square. They had tied up their cherished possessions in bundles with creepers and grass ropes and carried these bundles on their heads. Halliday looked at them too. They reminded him of newspaper photographs he had seen of wartime refugees—displaced persons. Friday re-emphasised the oblong with his stick—he didn't speak to Halliday now: he mistrusted Halliday's tongue. Friday conveyed everything by signs now. Friday believed in reticence now. It was necessary, Friday signified, for these travellers to go North first—to skirt the marshes.

Together they looked at the old, at the children, at the pregnant women. "You will guide us out of the marshes?" Friday shook his head. "Please." Friday shook his head again—pointed to the chiefs where they sat so silent and so bowed at the edge of the dwindling pool.

For many days Halliday had tried to persuade the chiefs to attempt the journey. He had drawn pictures of comfort in the dust, had drawn images. He had talked, he had implored. He had failed. They would not leave Manda; they would not leave *home*. In his heart he knew

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they were right. But he also knew he was committed to *his* negroes.

Yes, he must leave and before it rained: the decision had been taken. And while he had energy too. He did not feel well enough to persist in Manda longer. He was sure an attack of fever was almost on him. It would not be safe for him to be ill in Manda. Besides, some could not wait to leave. All the boys had sweated and practised with twirling sticks, and learned how to light a fire.

He had not slept with Kamante again; he was too tired and too disturbed. And too guilty. How he would have hated to have been thus used! The end and the means: the thought haunted him.

He looked at the travellers again. One of Friday's twin wives was in that procession; one remained. And at one of the corners of the square the loyal wife stood with a little group of faithful servants who watched and waited for Halliday and *his* negroes to go. He could not rid himself of the haunting idea that it was the 'responsible' who chose to remain. He almost expected to see that those who remained had some particular physical characteristic. Well, he must come back for them and the chiefs, that was all. Come back or send others. Nothing else for it.

"All right," he said. He hoisted his rifle. "All right," he called, "we must move." The boys shouted cheerfully. Up towards the log boats on the high bank moved the line of negroes. The faithful were to ferry them across the river, through the crocodiles, to the eastern bank. The journey was on.

He counted them: sixty-seven people. And three perhaps to be born on the way. They were grouped on the high bank looking back at the village; the ferrying had already begun. Some old women were shrieking with

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laughter, pointing out the ridiculousness of their situation and of each other. But some stood looking sadly back at Manda, at their home, at the huts they had lived and been born in, seeming already to see the grass and the rushes grow over the houses, the trodden square break up, and the rats and the birds roosting together on the deserted roof-tops. Was it his imagination or was the trodden square already breaking up? It would only need the rain. Perhaps, too, some of the old had a presentiment of their own deaths, when like Manda they would return to the earth. In spite of all.

Mind you, *some* remained. Perhaps Manda would re-flourish, or be re-born; but Doctor Halliday did not think so. The world had no use for Manda.

*“The wind goeth over it, it is gone.
And the place thereof shall know it no more.”*

He would like to have painted Manda—no matter how well or how badly.

Gloomy thoughts darkened his sweating face as he stood there among the exiles. The chosen people or the dregs? He was so depressed this morning. Perhaps he had often been like this—he could not remember. But then the allegory had never been so apparent, had it? He had never been so obviously thrust into the position of leader. It was Alejo who had led. He would never again deride those who led. He was a chief. The only saving grace was that he felt as old as the old women and therefore as tolerant as the earth.

The negroes were like refugees, making happy before a journey, before leaving a town, the bombed town or the plagued town. Before setting foot on the insecure, dried, and crumbling roads. What help or hindrance from above?

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The noise of this little town beside him, the cries of those in the boats, and the sadder bitter cries of the marsh birds, swelled up so that they resembled the waves in Stromness harbour beating against the slip of his father's house, merciless and strong, indeterminate and purposeful—as contradictory as usual in fact. Yes, this place had been like a broken mirror. Some of its pictures clear, some distorted. Still the flood of sunshine streamed down as always in Manda. One was not conditioned by the weather in Manda. Or was one utterly conditioned? These people were drifting in the sunshine. And he was drifting. Sometimes in truth, sometimes in illusion.

To the left and to the right of them the scarlet binding shrubs began to shed their petals and their leaves. Everyone was as surprised as himself. How often did such trees shed their leaves in Africa? The scarlet leaves blew up into the air in the dry wind covering the travellers like a benediction or a curse. They blew up into their faces and onto their frizzy hair and their heart-shaped heads, into the river, the huts, the roofs, and the streets of Manda, and depending on how you listened the leaves made a sound in the air that was a rejoicing sound or a lament. To Halliday they bled in the air these leaves, they were falling leaves—these scarlet leaves of Manda. They sobbed, they moaned in the air. If he never knew why, he must always remember to mourn them.

All morning the ferrying continued. In the afternoon, when the travellers were safe on the West bank of the marshes, Friday had left. Halliday had not seen him go. There had been no handshake. Seven men went with Friday. Well, thought Halliday, a lost friend, like any other loss, is a loss for ever—a dying. Perhaps though he *would* see Friday again.

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Anxious to make as much progress as possible before nightfall, hoping to discover drier ground, considering his compass, and the map he had copied from Friday's circle in the dust, Halliday set off immediately at the head of the procession, Kamante beside him, but moving slowly, conserving his energy, and theirs. He was surrounded by the boys: the boys jumped up and down, showing him their wounds and their sores, continually pointing out how well they were getting on, continually entreating him to raise his rifle to shoot another of the wild duck. Several times when he could hardly miss he did fire. He was conserving his strength and his ammunition—once on the land there were larger creatures to be shot.

Kamante walked beside him but was not happy.

By nightfall they found a patch of dry ground. There were trees here and dried dead wood—room for all. As he fell asleep he was conscious that each family had lit a fire and that all were lying around these fires so closely that they seemed almost to be falling into the ashes themselves.

Next day they pushed on through the swamp, emerged, found themselves in the outer marshes, turned South. Many this morning, unused to roasted flesh and having so gorged themselves, were sick. Yet all but one were happy and excited. The air too, stifling as it was, was cleaner than Manda. They breathed more deeply. He saw that their dingy yellow-black bodies were gritty from the ashes of the fires.

The boys tried to catch some of the smaller wading birds on the spits of dry ground: one of them gave a prodigious leap, succeeded. He thought them to be learning fast.

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Sometimes that day in these outer marshes they made their way towards an apparent island only to find the island was a sleeping mass of duck. "Wisssh, wisssh, wisssh," shouted the boys. 'Crack,' would go Halliday's rifle. And they found the accustomed leaves and roots. For the boys it was a picnic.

The legs of Halliday's worn trousers would not stay rolled up. He threw them off and walked in his shirt. He'd lost his canvas shoes long ago; his feet were as hard as the negroes'. His beard was long and red but neatly trimmed by his scalpel. Halliday the patriarch—leading the chosen people. "Some must serve, and some must lead," he muttered wearily. "Choose right."

Once he stopped and they all looked back into the marshes. The water stretched to the horizon on every side but one. This was a duller day than those preceding. Were the rains coming? The landscape at first sight appeared simply to consist of two colours: the blue sky and water, the dark brown mud and reed-beds. Today the expanse behind looked lifeless. It was only the teeming detail of the immediate surroundings that revived his spirits. He realised for the first time that Manda was not in the centre of the marshes, as he had always supposed, but only on the inner fringe. They were higher here, although they were still in the water, and that was why he could see this now. So what lay deeper, beyond Manda? One day perhaps he would find out.

He returned to his preoccupation: to get these people safely home. Home?

He missed Friday.

Another dawn; another day in the outer marshes.

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Another day he could not bring himself to love Kamante. "I wish you hated me," he said to her in English.

At dusk the following evening they moved out of the marshes on to a desert fringe: the people thought it a larger island.

They moved more directly South West. At night beside the circle of sparkling fires the people danced till the moon set.

But it was not until the third night in the desert fringe, when he saw that even the girls had learned to twirl the fire-sticks in the sockets of wood with the dry bits of fuzz from the birds' nests, saw that the old men had fashioned bone pipe tubes and drew up into their lungs smoke from hemp smouldering in little holes they had dug into the ground, tunnelling this smoke into their lungs as it were; it was not until the third night in the desert fringe that he realised that *his* negroes had been moving as slowly and lazily towards their new home as they had formerly moved in Manda, and that now they were beginning to light their fires, and lay down beside them and sweat, as exactly and as regularly as once they had doused themselves with the water from the marsh pools. His first tired reaction was to burst into a fit of hysterical laughter, his second to turn round and take them all back.

"Pain," had said Alejo long ago—well wasn't it Alejo?—"Every pain has its distinct and pregnant signification if we will but carefully search for it." Pain. Pain. Pain. But was it Alejo who'd said that or someone else? Someone called Hilton, was it? Someone long ago. Pain. Pain. Pain. Oh seek it out.

But searching as the miles were, no-one died on the way

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to Katopos. Except Kamante somewhat. And himself more than usual. This man Halliday was a responsible man. Only he was physically ill—the others it seemed to him grew fatter—except Kamante. He had the fever.

How he hated corrupters—his was at the very least an understandable failure. To those who could understand. Of course that girl Frances Irving was over-feminine—over-feminine. Unimaginatively she thought of too many things as her divine right, and had never been able to see where her happiness lay. It lay with him. It lay with him. Perhaps somewhere she knew it at last.

A fever was on him: he couldn't think straight. But everything he thought was true—over-vivid, exaggerated, but true. But too direct for Frances.

He loved Frances: they'd got at her too much—the corrupters—her vicarious friends. You couldn't have an honest conversation with Frances or any of them either. He was too late. She'd thought *his* protests an obsession. But they'd had their moments—she and Halliday—they'd had their moments. She'd thought they were honest then. What a fool he was. What a fool.

If only he'd been able to calculate; properly to communicate. He couldn't: he loved her. And her friends were too clever for him. Why did they want her? They weren't virile men. None of them were virile men. Perhaps that was the reason. Her secret. Her loyalties were so mistaken: she always believed the wrong lies. She'd lived with one fantastic liar. She said he needed her—of course he did. But so did Halliday. So did Halliday. "You're not all that good in bed anyway," said Frances.

Halliday shook his head again in Africa. He couldn't quite understand the nature of his illness. The point was he was continually being sick, and had dysentery, but

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really the fever was mild. He was on a switch-back—he went up and down on the fever.

Soon he couldn't be honest with Frances—desperately he tried to hang on—she didn't want him. He was a strong man with weaknesses. She wanted that other man—"a weak man with many strengths", she always said. Why did she so prefer him? It didn't make sense. What in hell was his name? He remembered everyone was on his side, Halliday's side, but her. Perhaps she had thought she could change the other. Oh Christ. Oh Christ. What was lacking that she didn't want *him*? What did *he* lack? "You're no good in bed," said Frances. No, it wasn't that! It couldn't be that!

He had delivered two babies on the march; he was very popular now, very well loved. Why was he feeling so sorry for himself? Because he had reason. And he'd got a fever—hadn't he?

He'd have fulfilled his obligations all right . . . he loved Frances . . . secure and all well . . . twelve o'clock and all's well. He *must* have been better than the other. He would have learned. "Use your imagination," said Frances. "Use your imagination in bed, for God's sake."

What can you do in such a case? Lose out gracefully . . . not bear malice . . . don't get corrupted yourself . . . but it affects your judgments doesn't it? You can only love once. "So: work, work." He'd spoken aloud. To hell with all vicarious lovers! At least he'd never been that. You're just as good a lover as they make you. She hadn't helped enough. He was only young. He used his imagination these days.

He brushed the flies off his forehead: There seemed to be far more flies settling on him than anyone else in the procession. Did they expect him to make a speech? He laughed. Then laughed at himself.

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There must be some moment when a man like himself actually loses—there must be the losing moment. Did she resent him for being a masculine man? Did she prefer feminine men?

Sweat all over him.

Kamante was happier since he was so palpably ill. Thank God for that. She did everything she could for him. For him of all people it was agonising to have to hurt her. He could see absolutely how she felt; he could have screamed. Why couldn't he at least make love to her? He had resorted to politeness. They were very polite. It was better than being vicious! And at nights he saw Kamante slept closer and closer to the fires.

Sometimes she simply looked up at him with those enormous liquid eyes which asked as they do in any language: "What's gone wrong?" He couldn't avoid such glances.

"What's gone wrong between us?" Now it was the woman who was asking *him*. He turned away, sick. He'd never wished to avenge himself on anybody. He hadn't meant to—he'd meant well—he'd made a mistake. A mistake . . . a mistake . . . a mistake.

More sweat: he squeezed himself like a sponge.

Still, he saw that Kamante put most of it down to the fever: she would wait. But he was taxing her strength. "Oh God, oh God, how we make each other suffer." "What?" said Kamante: he'd spoken aloud again. "A cliché," he said in English. "You can hear such a heartfelt remark any day of the week." He hadn't actually noticed she was walking beside him at this moment.

"But why did you set me up like this? Why?"

"What?" asked Halliday. Of course the girl had been silent—she hadn't actually spoken the question. She wasn't yet so articulate, so colloquial in English!

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So he and she alone on that march grew thinner. And the girl could not afford to grow thinner. Her limp too grew more pronounced. Was she dying also?

Halliday still walked at the head of the file but sometimes Kamante dropped back and walked with one of her brothers. She never wept like Halliday did—or not when he could see. Once, pathetically, she walked with one of the other young men, her smiling very forced. At first this young negro was pleased, then he grew irritated, and finally bored. He too had a sense of self-preservation; besides, he preferred someone else.

Halliday had had to retrieve his trousers: nearing Katopos the procession had become an excursion. Too many of the negroes who knew him in the villages they passed through had laughed too much to see him without his trousers. He was in no mood for ridicule.

By the time they were within ten miles of Katopos the word had gone round: the excursion grew into a conquering army. Dozens of negro sightseers, dozens of the lazy, of other sick, of children, of dogs, joined the file. They danced, sang and banged their drums. It was an outing. The Sunday School outing with the preacher. He thought he would go mad. God, he hated negroes.

The din grew; there was a vicious smile on his face. He could see the hill. He wished—like the Piper—it would open up before them so that he could lead them inside and the stone might roll back, swallow them up. Still the procession grew. *His* negroes were in a compact group close behind him; some were frightened by the dogs and all the noise.

Since he couldn't bear to turn round and reassure them, and could not pause in his walking, he looked down at the ground and when there stared up at him something

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yellow-bellied and fat, something that slid away, paused and looked, he picked up the nearest stick, mesmerised the snake with fevered eyes as it itself had mesmerised so many, and when it was dormant lifted the stick and broke its yellow back. Cheers from the Manda boys. But why dislike snakes so much, after all? Yet he felt much better for killing the snake.

The party moved on.

It was getting on for Christmas—in Regent Street in London they were already preparing the decorations—he knew that. But here it was going to rain. Everyone knew it would rain, they had evidence: black clouds were overhead. Halliday squeezed more sweat out of his head. Not long now. Thank God they had reached Katopos before the rain.

And in a way what was most astonishing about Manda was that it had never been strange—nothing was exactly parallel or obvious—yet all the pieces fitted. Or did for him.

The fever dropped on the switch-back; he grew calmer. He did not know how he was going to proceed in Katopos, he would have a better chance of knowing that when he was restored to health, but he did feel he had begun to know at last in his conscious and unconscious mind, had begun to be able to sense, something of that ancestral thread that draws us back. To put it another way: he realised that he, Halliday, must have always felt the need to go back and begin again. Something to do with his father again. He did wish he had known his father a little longer. But it was also much more—much more complex than that. And something new and outside him was drawing him back. It is curious, he thought, how you always have moments of profound clarity in a fever.

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And this man he was, he saw today, was such a vulnerable man, so prone to obsessions, so good at some things, so bad at others. Secure and insecure, but determined to dominate, to succeed, to get what he wanted. Halliday laughed for the first time that day. He would in the end get what he wanted. Or as everyone says—what he deserved. He would in the end understand something of what it was all about. Or understand enough.

But immediately after he had laughed he had shivered. A death shiver? And this 'going back', with all his knowledge, medical and otherwise, he hadn't yet been able to begin to explain. Would he ever? Manda was nearer the beginning—that was for sure. He had a longing to hear the waves of the sea. Then to swim in the sea, the colder the better.

"Look here," he said aloud again in a brief moment of energy—partly because he saw how close they were to the hill—"the bloody fever's got you, so hang on . . . they're all in like knives now . . . you're an optimistic man, remember that—to hell with mysticism and all ideologies . . . be humane eh?" He had the feeling that one of the old negresses walking behind him—not a lady from Manda—understood every word he said. So he continued speaking, partly to pass the time, partly for her benefit, and partly for his own. "Lose your illusions, go deeper into your convictions eh . . . be humane, old lady." This old lady grinned at him just like—like Friday. The noise—the brass and the cymbals—swelled up: they were almost there. Or was it simply the dogs barking. "Examine the living man, old lady . . . the living man . . . dignify him . . . ennable him . . . go back to the elementary truths . . . be old fashioned or be lost." "Aie, aie," said the old lady. "Aye, aye," said Halliday. "You can always long for it

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... sometimes attain it—human love.” “Aie, aie,” said the old lady giving him a string of beads. He stuck the beads on his head. “Aye, aye, consider . . . consider . . . enrich the age . . . be solitary only to communicate,” shouted Halliday. “Aie, aie,” said the old lady, snatching back her beads.

Only a mile from Katopos. Everyone started to sing, and since *his* negroes sang at a different pitch and with an altogether different tune he thought to himself what a vivid word ‘bedlam’ was. “Mind you,” he kept shouting to himself that last mile as he neared the tape, “I’m ill.” Oh he knew that the line between the mind and the body is thin as a hair, or interwoven rather. Perhaps best described as an untraceable thread.

“Aie, aie, aie,” sang his new friend beside him. “Aie, aie, aie.”

But such a vague future was visible that last mile through the jungle trees, the umbrella trees. And why did she have to do it to such a vulnerable man, that girl? She had raised him so high—so brilliantly. And then as they say, and like those wild duck flying so confidently over Manda, had shot him down. And so slowly too. And why had she begun with such promises? But it was Kamante who jogged his elbow. Who had done what to whom? And who was he to complain? Look at what he’d done! Then he couldn’t understand anything any more.

Just before they broke the tape—the last quarter—it all got much worse. Because what was the point of getting there. It was made worse too by the physical presence of *his* negroes crowding in on him—they infected him that last quarter. It seemed to him their disease infected the surrounding air and hung over the happy procession like a halo. An ignorant, stupid halo. Everything went round

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beneath that halo. He didn't realise they were holding him up. All he knew was that everything was repetitive. Perhaps what he should have done was take the world to Manda. Reverse the process. He was talking aloud all the time. "Surely I am like all others," he said, "a mixture of good and evil, at least I'm struggling with the evil." He thought himself to be cheered by this. "I may succeed . . . I may fail," he said—not at all aggressively. Then continued: "It's only recently I became inconstant . . . before this I always had a plan . . . whatever my loneliness . . . ups or downs. I was getting on all right up to now." He turned his head. "Well, wasn't I?" he shouted at the old lady with the beads.

He was being carried and so was able to see a light passing quickly in the sky overhead. This was the first Russian satellite.

In his state the light seemed to be running—it was just like *him*—years ago—at the time when he hated that feeling of being in love with Frances, and knowing the uselessness of such a love. And of her too. All that running to keep up. Oh Christ! "Of course," he said to the bearers—he'd even recognised their faces—"Christmas isn't all that near . . . I forget the month."

Actually the Russian satellite had passed overhead before—but he had not noticed.

And the only consoling things he could remember on that long slow journey from Manda, with its fevered end, were the sunsets. And what the sunsets had seemed most to contrast with was the unhappiness, the unintentional injustices, the lack of judgment of *tired* men.

Also, he had realised that water is the most interesting and helpful of all things. You can listen to water, can't you? It has such harmonies. It flows. A woman can be like

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water. "Oh yes, she can," he shouted at the old lady. "Even if you aren't." "Aie, aie," she said, and gave him the beads.

His last thought before they laid him down at Doctor da Gama's feet—the old Catholic sitting patiently on the rock at the foot of the Katopos hill—his last thought was that it was the waiting he couldn't stand. That he was all right face to face—whatever the news. He recognised Alejo and fainted.

Dear Alejo, patiently waiting, leaning forward on his stick. Dear Alejo. "Dear Alejo I am ill . . . I have a fever."

◆ 4 ◆

HE was sitting in the armchair again in the house in Regent's Park. No-one else was at home. Was Mrs. Joyce taking Deborah to school? He was going to have a bath in a moment. He had to get clean. He didn't know why he was waiting here unless it was to get the necessary energy. He had had breakfast in a café. He didn't find a taxi when he left the house in Earl's Court and had walked around for hours. And now he realised to his astonishment he had unconsciously dropped on his knees as if he were about to pray. "Please give me all the Christmas presents I want and may I score the winning try, dear God," he said, getting up off the floor and re-seating himself. He sat still. He was waiting for some entertainment to begin—that's what it was. Kamante's face detached itself from the pile of photographs and floated with a rejected expression into the air above the fire-place.

He lit himself a cigarette, poured himself a brandy. He

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realised what was happening to him but realised too that the knowledge could not at all prevent him from being dominated by the fantasies, or whatever they were.

He made an effort. He went to the bathroom and turned on the bath. After his bath he swallowed four of his sleeping pills and locked the bedroom door. He remembered to leave a note for Mrs. Joyce.

In the double bed in the house in Regent's Park he slept for several hours. He was wakened by the traffic going home. Mrs. Joyce had been right about the traffic—for a moment he thought he was in the middle of some new nightmare.

He shouted for Mrs. Joyce. He had to get out of bed to unlock the door. "Come in," he said.

"Where's Deborah?" he asked.

"I've put her to bed. She's got a cold coming on."

"I slept all day."

"You did that."

"I'm sorry to have been behaving so strangely but I had some bad news. I . . . well I had some bad news."

"I guessed as much."

"The traffic woke me."

"It takes a bit of getting used to."

"How've you been getting on?"

She simply laughed.

"Come on, tell me how you've been getting on."

"Much as usual."

She was looking at him so intently. What did she want him to say?

"Did anyone call me up?"

"Yes, several people. I've said you're sick."

She was willing him to say something. Or perhaps she had some information she was holding back.

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"You were out when I came in this morning. I shouted for you but you weren't here."

"I was taking Debby to school."

"About half-past eight."

"Yes."

Her face might have been austere but that he saw in it such a talent and such an appetite for happiness.

"You always take her to school at that time?"

"Yes."

He saw that her skin was fine, that she used little make-up, even on her lips, that she was wearing a plain frock and that this frock had been carefully bought. Her chin was firm and like his own. But the lines around her eyes, her nose and her mouth were delicate lines.

"You're staring at me," she said.

"Yes."

She'd be about thirty-five, he supposed.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Thirty-five."

She had become very beautiful indeed. But he'd thought that before. And he was sure she had some secret.

Then he knew.

He got up off the bed and went towards her. His last wistful thought before he kissed her was that it had taken all these years and all these events to prepare him for Mrs. Joyce.

◆ 5 ◆

SYANI smiled down at him through the mosquito netting. "You're better," said Syani. Apparently he was.

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The noises of Katopos drifted in through the open windows—the chatter of negro voices, the cries of the sick, the bustle, the laughter, the clearing back of the jungle, the tramp of barefooted men and women coming and going on the hill. And the accustomed smell: the smell that was chemical and clean.

There she stood: Syani. Slightly pigeon-toed. One of the *mistas*. Three-quarter negress, one-quarter Portuguese, neurotic, exciting, febrile, a vivid form of flesh and blood.

“So how are you, old thing?” said Syani, smiling wickedly in a European dress.

“What’s good about you,” said Halliday, “is that you so enjoy being loved. And it’s nice to see a sophisticated woman.”

She didn’t answer immediately, which was surprising. Syani was articulate, full of her own phrases. Syani was moody, and genuinely uninhibited in his bed. She was as supple as a contortionist in his bed, articulate in all ways, and flattered him outrageously when he needed it. She’d been a comfort for years.

Halliday was very fond of Syani. She’d been loyal. He understood why. No-one had ever complained of their relationship—it was open, helpful, necessary and comprehended. It was sex. Neither of them expected or demanded any more from each other than they got. Or so he thought. When he saw her brooding he never enquired too deeply; they bored each other if they talked long, in spite of her enchanting phrases.

“You’ve been most ill,” said Syani. “A bad attack of fever. Doctor da Gama was worried. And very much so was I. You’ll be able to get up soon. Win back your strength. I missed you. I thought I’d go mad.” All this

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said huskily, in English phrases with African inflexions. "I thought I'd have to get out my giraffe," said Syani—a private joke this.

Halliday laughed; her English charmed him, particularly now he had not heard it for some time. She was also colloquial in her own language and in Portuguese. Yes, Syani had a gift for sex and languages. But when she grew excited she always used her own tongue. He wondered this morning if somehow she might have done better for herself. He had thought of this before, but all his former suggestions she had resisted.

"Now," said Syani in a firmer tone. "This little Kamante. What to her have you been up to? I hope she was clean."

So Halliday told her what he could about Kamante.

"They had to drag her away from you when you fainted."

"Yes?"

"Doctor Gama has put them all together in the long ward."

"Yes?"

"None of them will leave it. Her too. They're all in the long ward with their fires happy as sand-boys. All happy but her."

"Yes?"

"They keep their fires burning long all the day." Then after a pause in which each was considering Kamante, "The women get over these things—sometimes."

"But not she?"

"I do not think she. They won't leave the long ward. No, I do not think she is happy. She loves you, they say. She is your woman they say." Another pause.

"Could you help?"

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“No good.” With a slight and feminine maliciousness Syani added: “It will have to be managed by yourself. Will you tell me about it?”

“When I am well.” Then: “I only slept with her once. She just . . . just . . . fulfilled a purpose. I . . . it’s very shocking.” There was a further pause before Halliday changed the subject.

“When is Alejo coming to see me?”

“At the eating hour.”

“It was a bad attack of fever that. I’ve never had one like that myself before. Now I know what people feel. How long was I sick?”

“Seven days.”

“People don’t expect doctors to be ill, do they?”

“They don’t expect doctors to go to the lavatory,” said Syani.

Because she was black and so sensuous this morning there was something about her which reminded him of a mediaeval devil. She was also excited at the thought of him with another woman.

“You’re marvellous looking,” he said.

“And you,” said Syani, “to women are very attractive. She must have enjoyed herself.”

“That’s all over,” said Halliday. “Don’t joke about it.” And then. “Why am I so attractive to women?”

“Because sometimes, but not always, you like them so much.”

“I wasn’t always attractive to women,” said Halliday. “You have to learn.”

She lit him a cigarette, drew on it first. It tasted odd and he put it out. “How is Alejo? The last thing I remember is that he looked so old and yellow sitting on the rock. Absolutely worn out by fifty years of unselfishness—I never

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realised how old he was before. Being away did that I suppose."

"He is very frail. Frail? Is that the right word?"

"Yes. I'm afraid it is."

"I've never used it before—"frail"."

"There seemed to be an extra smell of chemicals here when I was ill—such a smell of sickness and death."

"It is always here. Have not you ever noticed?"

"Not so much. I hope I'm never so tired again. Thought it would never end. Would you take off some of these blankets?"

Syani knelt under the mosquito netting and did so. She did not resist biting his ear.

"Get away," he said. "I'm too weak for you."

They laughed but he was right: when he tried to stand up he staggered and had to sit down on the bed. "The interesting thing is that even during the worst I noticed what a passionate interest I had in survival."

"Passionate!"

"Yes, passionate!"

She pinched him.

"Get away from me," he said again. "I mean I didn't realise before how sure I personally was that nothing's more important and desirable than the mere act of living. And you're a terrible nurse!"

"Get well soon," said Syani. "I'm going to make us some coffee."

So he sat on the bed looking at the room: at his paintings that she had nailed up on the walls. At his own favourite—a view from the top of the Katopos hill of a negro walking North into the middle of Africa.

He tried to stand up again and succeeded. He leaned against the wall by the window looking out at the com-

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pound, at the hospital buildings, most of which he had built. He looked at the long row of narrow structures on this terrace cut out of the hillside. It was the familiar scene: jungle on three sides, little parties of negroes cutting it back, buds on the roof-tops, negroes struggling up the hill, some carrying the sick on their backs, some on rough litters, and those who had been restored going home to their villages. He looked across at the long ward with the screened windows where *his* negroes and Kamante lay. Kamante. He could see the smoke from their perpetual fires curling out from these windows. In a day or two he would have to begin work. Kamante. Kamante. How would he make his peace with Kamante?

There was a discreet tap on the door. "Come in," said Halliday.

A neat sallow man entered—so dignified and smart in these surroundings. It was Alvarez, a Portuguese official who visited the hospital from time to time. A failed diplomat with an alcoholic wife—a voluntary exile—a suave but cynical man. What had he hoped once to discover in Africa? Africa the absolute!

"Ah," he said. "I understood you to be recovered."

"Weak," said Halliday, "but better. I'll be up and about again in a couple of days."

"I have a piece of news for you," said Alvarez with his deprecating smile. Halliday did not like Alvarez. Nor he supposed did many others. "Unofficial of course. How shall I put it? I'll be brief. When your Queen was good enough to visit us in Lisbon your name was mentioned in certain quarters, in certain official circles, as someone who should be honoured for your services to medicine and to us—to Portugal. Consequently there have been articles that have appeared in both our countries . . . informing

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people more closely of your work . . . in newspapers . . . all this while you were away. So that the bond between our countries—between the oldest allies, Portugal and England—might be strengthened in whatever tiny way. This cannot be anything but good. Can you picture the whole sequence of events, dear Doctor? We have been publicising your work a little—so people will know who you are.”

There was a pause. Then: “Thank you, Alvarez,” said Halliday. “Go on.”

“Naturally this recognition will take official form.”

“Oh yes,” said Halliday. “And what do you have in mind? Money for the hospital?”

“Oh no, not that. Though that of course may well occur subsequently—at some future date. Something personal. Both from our government and I understand from yours. Some honour. Some symbol of our gratitude. Naturally I am not myself in a position to disclose or even to know what exact form the honour will take.”

“Naturally,” said Halliday.

“So may I be the first to congratulate you and to suggest it would be most helpful if you should accept.”

“Balls,” said Halliday.

“I beg your pardon.”

“Balls,” said Halliday.

“In English that is a term of disrespect?”

“Yes.”

“Of derision also?”

“Yes.”

“I may have occasion to use the epithet privately,” said Alvarez—who was not a fool.

“I shall decline,” said Halliday.

Alvarez bowed. “Discreetly?”

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“How else!”

“Well then,” said Alvarez, “to be honest I am secretly rather pleased. Still, think it over before you decline. In any case, Doctor Halliday, I shall now love you and leave.”

Alvarez did so. Halliday shook his head. Alvarez' English was very good indeed, thought Halliday. Much better than his own Portuguese. And perhaps Alvarez was not as unpleasant as he had always supposed.

He turned back to the window. Once again he looked out at the compound, and at the hospital where he had worked for twenty-five years. Even the African air seemed urbane and ironical this morning. How would he make his peace with Kamante?

He looked at the Manda smoke curling luxuriously out of the screened windows and up through the corridor, the gap between the roofs. Yes, in a few days he would be on his feet and working. And whom could they send for the chiefs? And Friday? Oh Friday!

And now he saw Alejo descend the steps from the insane ward, and he watched him all the way across the compound in that old linen suit, in that old grey sun hat, leaning so heavily on that stick, walking so slowly across the compound towards his rooms. Dear Alejo! The gongs banged: the parties cutting back the jungle ceased their working; people began to get excited and conversational, and everyone sat down. It was the hour to eat.

Halliday was back at work but not recovered as well as he had hoped: the fever had apparently ended but the sickness seemed to hang over him and would not entirely be shaken off. “You’re very anaemic,” said Alejo one morning.

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"Oh, I'm all right," said Halliday, irritated. "What do you expect from those bloody marshes! I'll be okay. I probably got up too soon. I was starved in those marshes."

"Yes," said Alejo. "Symptoms are the voice of nature."

"Oh," said Halliday, more irritated. "I'll get them right, these people." They turned and looked towards the long ward.

"Those bloody fires," said Halliday. "But I'll get them right."

"Be sure you don't put them out."

"You're very Roman Catholic this morning!" And they both laughed. But Alejo had not looked at his happiest.

"I'll get them right," repeated Halliday aggressively. "Of course you will," said Alejo gently. And turned away to work.

But Halliday was angry with him: didn't Alejo think he would get them right? Christ though, he wished he would feel better; he was so bloody tired.

Not even Syani could excite him, certainly not relax him. Once or twice when she had tried, and left his room depressed, he had consciously looked down at his loins to confirm that there was still something there. And there was no-one yet to send back to Manda. Would there ever be?

For the first time in his life he had begun seriously to drink. He found he liked brandy best.

Yet for the moment he seemed to be able to manage the routine tasks with reasonable efficiency. He didn't have any major operations to undertake. He would have avoided them if they had occurred: he saw his hands were shaking. But what was most exhausting was the talking to his negroes: hour after hour, trying to re-educate them, to acquaint them with the world, to befriend them, to know them, to cajole them, to persuade them to *live*.

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Oh how he had talked in that long ward by the fires, those compassionate eyes of his fevered and gleaming in the light. He had brought them pictures, photographs of the world, photographs of cities, of Eskimos, of Indians and of their own kind. But nothing would persuade them to leave those fires—to leave that comfort. They sweated there, they talked to each other, they procreated, they ate in peace. And he grew thinner, tugged out his brandy flask and drank.

The others tried too—Alejo, Bennett, and the young Portuguese Salamar. They all tried in their different fashions whenever they had time to show those negroes what might be. And what was. They told in their different voices what they might achieve; that they were just as other men. Even Syani tried in her European dress.

“Don’t take it so personally,” Syani said one night.

But he did. He continued to take it personally. He wasted. And what galled him also was that he was so much less successful than the chiefs; these people *had* worked for the chiefs, *had* lived—however poorly. They would not help him build, clear the jungle, nurse the other sick.

The days passed. These negroes did not leave the long ward at all now. They had seemed to arrive at one simple and apparently ineradicable belief that it was their lot to live in comfort; that they were the ‘chiefs’; that Halliday and all others such were the ‘servants’. They were drones.

But happy! Oh, they sat there so happily sweating by the fires, the people from Manda. And no-one had the heart to starve them yet—to force another issue—to be impulsive. Their food was brought—they grew fatter—and physically more well. *

In native eyes the women grew beautiful. There were

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many admiring glances from the other sufferers at the beauty of the women of Manda. Fat, huge-breasted, whitened with flour. They shone, they sparkled with fat and with moisture. A European would have said they were growing obese. Little fat women with heart-shaped heads.

Alejo decided to cut their rations. They complained bitterly: they sobbed, they wailed. Alejo was firm. Other patients therefore smuggled them extra food. Yes, all was well for the servants of Manda during these days, they had become the true parasites at last.

“But give them time,” said Alejo. “They have reconditioned themselves to sweating after all. A patient man may yet see. We must keep all extras away from them. A strict diet from now on.”

And Kamante? Much as Halliday had grown to resent his negroes at this time, it was an individual, it was Kamante who made him suffer most. He could not explain to her what he had done. Or why. Any personal advance was met with such trembling hopes of a renewal of his affection, a reconciliation, that trembling also he drew back. Every thought, every sight of her reproached him. At this period of his life if Halliday did not drink he felt lost. It was only when drunk that he had any kind of peace.

The days passed.

The people of Manda vaguely remembered him as their saviour but at last he had become a bore. No interference with their comforts, no criticism—they did not want that.

They resented him at their fires, they drew away together, left him solitary in the long ward.

He drank. He could be humorous and witty when drunk, and even serious. But if seriousness was persisted in

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by any companion he would grow nasty, would shout or leave.

A month or so after he had got up from his sick bed in early November—it had not been so near Christmas as on his fevered march from Manda he had supposed—a mild epidemic struck the villages around Katopos. This epidemic distracted Halliday and the other doctors from the long ward and exhausted Halliday even more. He had to drink more brandy simply to keep on his feet.

“There must be other methods, newer methods of dealing with your negroes, hypnosis or something. We need a good psychiatrist perhaps, ought to get someone out,” Bennett had said at lunch that day.

“Don’t you think I know that,” said Halliday, banging his fist.

“What about the people left behind,” said Bennett.

“Oh Christ,” shouted Halliday. “Shut up.”

“Come on,” said Alejo. “We’re all exhausted. Come on.”

“No need to bite my head off,” said Bennett.

It was evening and late and he was more exhausted and more drunk. He had had to walk from the foot of the hill. Twice he had stopped breathless and taken a pull at the perpetual flask.

He decided to go to his rooms through the long ward. It was a cold night already. The moon shone. The moon had ‘lost its belly’ tonight. Most of the Mandans were asleep. Tonight he felt completely bitter at what they had become. He saw that Kamante had withdrawn even further into herself—closer into her fire. Once she would have woken at his step.

When he reached his rooms he went on drinking. Syani came: he told her to go. Alejo came; he told him to go.

“One moment,” said the old man. Alejo drew himself

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up and an expression passed over his face that made him look like a lay-brother despite his tropical suit. "When we were boys at the circus," he said, with a curiously melancholy grimace, "we used to have a saying that true wisdom wears a clown's face. The most learned monk I knew had a constantly astonished expression."

"We're all clowns," said Halliday humourlessly.

"He could walk on his hands with his legs in the air that monk," said Alejo. Alejo clicked his tongue and sighed. "I know you don't believe in miracles." He sighed again. Lowering his voice and looking at Halliday with a natural pity he said slowly: "We all cry sometime . . . one weeps because . . . God is concerned with you . . . you would be an admirable man if you could just accept being one more man and not special. Have patience. Prayer is valid."

"Not for me."

"You too are here to kneel," said Alejo. Halliday could hear a fly buzzing somewhere near the ceiling. He was intensely conscious of the smell of brandy; it would be with him he felt for as long as he lived. His eyes were half shut. He sensed two things: a note of supplication in the old man's voice and a growing resentment of that voice within him.

"Perhaps I am being just a little mad," he muttered.

"You will get well," said Alejo. "I pray for you. Prayer is more than an order of thought. Prayer is not only an occasion when you listen to your own voice—you listen also to the voices of the dead."

"I'm good at that!"

"Such communication is beyond words. Seek an acceptance. The end is beyond your comprehension . . . therefore wait. Christ himself stood at the door and knocked. Give yourself . . . give yourself to the unknown . . . you're

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not ready for conclusions. No man can find grace alone. What we do and have done is only a husk . . . there are meanings to be discovered within. You are too young a man to judge yourself; nor is the judgement yours."

"It is God's," said Halliday sarcastically.

"It is God's," said Alejo.

The fly stopped its buzzing. It had burned itself to death on the oil lamp. Both men looked up. Halliday laughed. The old man thought how vast was the family of God and how different were some of its members. He looked tired. "Think of the day," he said. "Sunrise, sunset, sunrise again. Manda has served its purpose. Let it be." Halliday thought for a moment he could smell the singed wings of the dead fly above. He rubbed his nose. "Forgive yourself," said Alejo. "Both bad and good. Refine yourself. I tell you all shall be well."

"I am at the end," said Halliday. "Not at the beginning."

"We are always at the beginning," said the old man, and for some reason started to smile for the first time since he had entered the room—perhaps because he was convinced of the truth of his remark. But the smiling irritated Halliday. Alejo moved towards the door. "Goodnight, Ben," he said. "Stop indulging yourself. What you need is a condition of simplicity, of belonging, of acceptance. Don't give up the search." He put his hand on the latch. "I too have made many, many, mistakes. Not that that's a comfort." Then, unexpectedly, tears came into his eyes and he trembled: "I do love you," he said.

Alejo had gone. Had he left a year ago?

Halliday was staring at his painting of that proud negro walking north into Africa. Such an optimistic painting. Oh, Friday, Friday. He drank.

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He wanted to prove something to Alejo. He couldn't think what it was. But it was growing within him.

He was guilty, conscious of the justice of all reproaches. Obsessive. Turning every past event in upon himself. He drank.

The Catholic advice was meaningless but full of meaning. There was definitely something to be proved. He grew drunker. He would prove something. He stumbled up from his chair: he had used the lame girl before. Shouldn't he use her again? Another stage? Another crack in the rock. Shouldn't he use her again? Shouldn't he? He staggered out of the room across the compound he knew so well. Past the sleeping groups of negroes down the long ward.

Kamante was only the second person he'd *hated* in his life, wasn't she? He'd not been to Auschwitz or Belsen after all. He'd not been personally tortured. The first person he'd briefly hated was a girl called Frances Irving he'd known in London long ago. But he'd got over that, he thought. Yet somehow in this night of madness, this night of intolerance, these women became one. His physical exhaustion and his fever were responsible, for what? For some perhaps they would have been responsible for nothing. But he felt that his blood that night had grown cruel, had grown thin. The brandy knocked and pounded at the sides of his brain. No tolerance. No tolerance at all!

He went past the close and huddled sleepers of Manda. He found Kamante where she was. He woke her. He pulled her up.

"Come with me," he muttered to her in her own language. "Come with me. You love me, don't you?" She understood the words. And at this moment also he was sick enough to smile at her. So what did she expect?

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He took her up the Katopos hillside. Took her up the path above the hospital beside the barren volcanic outcrop where he used when he was young to think, to sit, to paint.

There was a bright cold moon. Below them lay the lighted hospital like some great stranded ship. The girl was not shivering yet. The girl misunderstood.

“Listen,” Halliday said. “Really listen. It’s cold up here. We’ve got a plague on—an epidemic rather. A lot of people are ill. I’m bloody tired. I can’t stand much more of this. And I’m bloody drunk. Listen. It’s cold. It’s high up here. You’ve never been so high. No more fires for you. I’ll marry you.”

Was there a faint bluish tinge on those black lips of hers in the moonlight?

“And d’you know what,” said Halliday. “Drinkers are never romantic. My father was a drinker and in the end he wasn’t romantic at all. He destroyed himself like you lot, he had an instinct for self-destruction—not that it seemed so then—but he did. He needn’t have gone. Oh, for Christ’s sake, why did he go? I just can’t stand any more of this. The whole world’s gone sour on me. It’s got to stop or I’ll kill myself.” Drunken tears fell from Halliday’s eyes.

“He had no need to go . . . that was the point . . . he meant to drown. He wanted to drown. He hadn’t the guts to kill himself. Riddled with pity—eternally confessing, my father. So listen!” He shouted at her because he didn’t think she *was* listening. “Stop shivering and listen.” He shook her. “Listen, you silly little black stupid bitch, there are other men than me in the world and better ones and you can sweat as well as any and be as cold as any, and *all* your people can, and you don’t have to sit by the

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fires all day, and you can work! Do you understand me, you can help the rest of us out. You can work!"

Then Halliday hit her across the face because it seemed to him that she still wasn't listening. And that she didn't understand.

"Listen," he shouted. "I used you. Don't you understand. You should be glad, glad to help."

The girl shivered violently, looked up at this sick, desperate, honest, drunken man who had struck her, looked at him for some . . . some fragment of recognition, some reassurance of what there once had been, and though she couldn't see it, there still was. She saw none. She seemed to shrink. She moaned. Conventionally she seemed to cry: was I born for this?

And whether it was simply the misunderstanding, or the blow across the face, or a combination of all things—rejection, the world, the cold, the lameness and the physical state of her heart—whatever it was, this girl Kamante died there on the Katopos hillside in the darkness.

At first he could not understand why she had fallen. Twice he put his head against her chest. He thought she sighed.

His mouth had gone completely dry. He stumbled away from the body. Then came back and picked it up. It was not cold.

Only part of him believed this to be real. It was too dreadful to be real. He thought of throwing her into the rocks. He would have given absolutely anything to have restored life.

He began to carry her down the track towards the hospital lights. His eyes were fixed on the ground. The images of responsibility grew more and more terrifying.

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He stopped often to change the body from one shoulder to the other. For a while he found himself wandering far from the path and in the wrong direction—in the direction of Manda in fact. It was the thought of his neglect once she had achieved his purpose that tormented him most. A lamb. A sacrificial lamb. He had to stop again and was sick.

When at last he reached the vague mass of the hospital he leaned against the trunk of a tree. He did not seem able to support the weight of conscience contained in the body on his shoulder any longer. It was like some cross. A few yards away the curtain of Alejo's window, caught by the wind, fluttered outwards. He tried to call to the old man. But he couldn't. He made a final effort and peered into the room. He saw by the moonlight that the old man was fast asleep. He stood there peering into the room, bracing himself to keep his burden on his shoulders, determined not to let it fall, succeeding by sheer force of a will dragged up from God knows where. "Alejo," he tried to whisper. The old man's sleep was so calm he seemed too to be embarked upon it for eternity. His breathing was vaster than the night wind. Was he too . . . "Alejo," cried Halliday, finding his voice at last. "Alejo! For God's sake help me."

Under the oil-lamps Alejo examined the dead body, muttered only: "She had a heart attack."

The old man took a syringe, sterilised it and loaded it with morphia. He injected Halliday where Halliday stood, still gazing down. He took him by the hand and led him across the compound. He sat beside Halliday's bed until

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the dawn came. And it was in this chair two days later he opened a letter and read to Halliday—a letter from the Prime Minister of England on behalf of Her Majesty, Her Majesty Elizabeth the Queen.

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IN London everything had changed. He was at peace. He sat on the edge of the bed—glowing, dazed, wondering. Truly happy. Thinking himself in love at last. It was extraordinary. His luck had turned about.

When he heard a knock on the door and said, "Come in," Deborah entered carrying a telegram and some letters.

"Here's the post," said Deborah, "I'm just off to school and there's a telegram."

"Will you have a nice day?"

"All right."

"All right?"

"Yes. All right. I said so, didn't I? Mummy's putting your clothes out to go to the Palace in."

"Is she?"

He opened the telegram first. It ran:

"YOUR NEGROES HAVE RETURNED TO THEIR WARD STOP EITHER THEY COULD NOT FIND THEIR WAY BACK TO MANDA OR JUST GOT BORED WITH THE IDEA STOP KNOWING THEM PROBABLY THE LATTER STOP THINGS RATHER CHAOTIC STOP BUT DO NOT WORRY WE WILL MANAGE TILL YOU GET BACK STOP HAVE A GOOD HOLIDAY BENNETT"

Halliday crumpled up the telegram and threw it into the waste-paper basket. "Shall I take you to school this morning?"

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"If you'd like to," said Deborah.

Halliday smiled; he was obviously not going to get much affection from this serious child until she considered he had earned it. "I would like to," he said.

"You'll have to hurry up or we'll be late."

He kissed Aileen and got into the black car to set off to the Palace. He was going to the Palace because it seemed the most sensible thing to do. He wanted to get all this sort of thing over quickly and return to Aileen. Other things held no interest.

He felt clear-headed and guiltless. He felt detached from everything but this woman he had fallen in love with—this woman who had secured him. She absorbed him. He was thinking of a dozen ways to please her. He would take her to Ireland.

During the ceremony there was a weight and finality about his gestures. Gone were all desires to mock himself or others, though it occurred to him that here was a perfect place to make a scene. When he came outside and was met by a journalist he did however commit himself.

"Congratulations, Sir Benjamin."

"Thank you."

"When are you going back to Africa?"

"Never."

"Never?"

Halliday paused. "No," he said. "I shall never go back to Africa. I think one place is just as bad as another. Or as good as another. I've opted out. If you want to be a good doctor and look after people, here's just as suitable as anywhere else. I've finished with all that romantic balls. I don't believe in such things any more. I just want to get

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on with my own life. I've done my share." He noticed his hands had stopped shaking and he no longer had any desire to distract himself with drink. "As a matter of fact all that sort of thing bores me now. What sort of contribution can an individual make anyway? It's pointless, isn't it? I mean it's pointless nowadays. The world's got too big. It moves too fast, doesn't it? For any of us. Let's be real."

The journalist looked hurriedly around and saw that his rivals were busy chatting away elsewhere. Then: "Do you really mean this?" he said. "Or are you pulling my leg?"

"Oh, I mean it," said Halliday.

"So what are you going to do?"

"I told you," said Halliday. "I'm retiring. I'm living my own life for a change."

"Do you think you can?" said the journalist.

"Christ," said Halliday. "Millions of others do." And he started to walk towards the fat and grinning chauffeur waiting to drive him home to Aileen Joyce.

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◆ I ◆

SHE woke. She reached out to touch him with her hand but all she touched was the sheet. It was his absence that had woken her. She saw his outline at the window.

“Ben.”

“Yes.”

“Still worrying yourself?”

“No. I was just looking out at the Park. I was thinking what a relief it is to be happy. I am somebody totally different.”

“Yes?”

“I love you, you know.”

“Come back to bed or you’ll get cold.”

When he did so she took him in her arms and covered him with kisses like a child.

Aileen was shopping; Deborah at school. Patches of sunlight glanced off the snow-covered roofs of the houses in the square and flitted across the pools on the thawing road below. He sat at a table at the drawing-room window writing in an old exercise book of Deborah’s. Pictures of the sun, of the moon, of horses and of boats stared up at him from various pages—gaily coloured pictures. They were not unsuitable illustrations. He stopped writing. He found himself wondering this morning if some of his actions in Manda had been affected by his physical exhaustion and the onset of fever. Probably not. And yet . . . that African morning for instance when one of the chiefs had pushed the starving child on his face and he had first

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fired his rifle in Manda—would he have fired had he been well and rested?

This morning it did seem that what he had lacked most was patience. He might very well have persuaded the servants without . . . without Kamante's help, if only he had had the patience. Patience? He began to brood. Was it not rather a question of humility! Was not that the wisdom he had needed? How difficult it was to keep one's superiority to one's self: to keep one's strength in check. To serve every day.

But this sort of brooding, which he was still prone to, was no longer obsessional, nor worm-eaten with guilt. Naturally he was not yet detached, and this a disinterested curiosity, but some sort of objectivity was beginning to play its part. He was on the mend, he thought. He wanted to love Aileen Joyce as well as he was able. The relationship seemed already to contain an astonishing and unexpected grace. He had standards of comparison. Life again held promise.

He glanced down the road; he wished Aileen would hurry home. He would have gone shopping with her but that he loved watching her walking up the road towards him knowing he was at the window.

So: much of his guilt had left him. He was rarely curious about the past when Aileen was there. If he was haunted by anything it was by Aileen. He would have summed up the present situation by describing himself as a man who had at last fallen in love and cared for little else; a man who knew himself to be as godless as before but was cheerful that he continued to be so. As to godlessness, he'd come to the conclusion that some are godless as some are sexless and he was one such. And some are rightly so, and right to be so, and better off so. If God

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were to have appeared in the house he wouldn't have blinked an eye. What difference could it make to a man like him? Certainly, and naturally, he still had his moments of insecurity, but these were more than balanced by moments of overpowering happiness, and of a kind of happiness he had not really hoped ever to have realised. He didn't want anything different, nor any interference. He sensed his enormous luck with this woman. He wanted to preserve it. He had never thought a man should expect too much of the world—or too much help. Certainly not more than he had found. Yes, things had changed once again and life was good enough for Halliday.

What he was most afraid of was losing Aileen.

Halliday looked out at the road. Then at the exercise book to read what he had written. As he read this morning he grew irritated. He had written as to someone younger:

“A doctor's work is so varied. Is there anyone of whom more responsibility is demanded, or upon whom the burden of being right is more often imposed? Without the benefits of absolute information we have to be at once prophet and priest, scientist and healer. Some of our patients believe us to be God, others the Devil, and many are only too ready to be off if our orthodox and honest attempt doesn't convince, or work a miraculous cure.

“And as for our emotions in the matter, well, as the healthy man knows, we're mostly reasonable fellows trying to do our best depending on our abilities and our energies, and according to our lights, in the face of continual difficulties and stress. The only way we can continually help is to continually try humanely, to be observant, always imposing commonsense upon what we scientifically know. Medical knowledge is ever increasing

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and therefore changing. A doctor, as others, must keep up with the times. He cannot relax on any professional occasion. He must be accurate in diagnosis, accurate in prognosis, psychologically intent, watchful to the very end.

"I think myself that personality and powers of persuasion contribute enormously but material success does not. I think also . . ."

Halliday frowned: why was he writing in this way? And wasn't it pompous? He had not shown any of this writing to Aileen. When he saw her coming down the road and smiling up at the window where he sat he got up from the table, took the exercise book and threw it into the fire. Then he was sorry he had not torn out Deborah's drawings before he had burned the book.

He would not give way to that part of his nature lying dormant, nor did he foresee that it would inevitably out.

"I couldn't believe it when I read it," said Boyd Smith nervously. "I was positive it was just a newspaper story."

"It's quite true."

"But will you never go back? Never?"

"Never. Why should I?"

"You're just going to drop everything . . . your . . . your . . ."

"Life's work," completed Halliday dryly.

"Well, yes."

"Let's not talk about me. There's nothing for me out there and I'm more than happy where I am. What do you want?"

"Well," said Smith defensively. "It's difficult for me to know how best to begin or what to say because when I

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arranged to come and see you I thought of you so differently . . . I admired you so much . . . everything you seemed to stand for, and I still can't believe it but . . . look here, whatever *you* feel I want to go out and work in your hospital."

"Why?"

"Oh, what with the bomb and everything I can't stand not doing something useful."

"Then do it here."

"Yes, I agree, but you see I've got so many ties and things here—so many interfering relations. I'm not getting on with my wife and I'm sure a clean break's best. Besides, sir, I'm fed up with England. I can't bear our official hypocrisy any more. And it's perfectly true that we're all two whiskies below par. Look here, sir, if you saw the people I work with you'd understand. I find it a very claustrophobic place."

"I've seen the people you work with."

"They're so selfish—way behind the times—no imagination and incredibly smug. I . . . I want a different landscape."

Halliday laughed.

"You may laugh but I think it's sad."

"I laughed because you yourself are so identifiably and peculiarly English," said Halliday. "And you haven't convinced me that in the end you wouldn't be happier and of more service here. On the contrary in fact."

"Let me be judge of that, sir."

"Oh quite."

"I think we owe the negro a great deal."

There was a pause. Then: "You mean that?"

"My generation must recompense the negro," said Smith. "I'd like to have been a doctor myself but it's too

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late so what I want is to go out to your hospital in some sort of organising capacity and raise money for it or something—any kind of work like that—make a start. And . . . and,” he added lamely, “I think I might grow up a little and find out more about myself.”

“I think you will,” said Halliday. “I’ll write some letters for you.”

“I’ve got a little money of my own so I won’t need a salary until I’ve earned it,” said Smith, embarrassedly.

“How fortunate,” said Halliday, and grinned.

As Smith got up to go, clutching his letters, Halliday grinned at him again and said: “I think you’re an idiot, Smith.” And then he added, “The problem I’m no longer interested in, Smith, is to serve the weak with patience, and to serve until the end.”

He knew very well the little girl was tiptoeing across the room towards him but he pretended not to hear. He was waiting for those warm little arms to hug him round the neck. He knew he was about to receive what she called her ‘best hug’. It was a very tight hug—she used all her strength in her ‘best hug’—and like the child he felt that one could never get close enough.

“Are you going on a plane?”

“Yes.”

“Because it’s quicker?”

“Yes.”

“Do you like planes?”

“I’ve never been in one before.”

“While you’re away I’m going to the circus with Penny.”

“Yes.”

“Mummy gave her mother the money.”

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“Yes. Did you have a good day?”

“I wish I could learn all my lessons so I wouldn’t have to go to school.”

“But you told me you liked school.”

“It’s the best place. I wish you didn’t have to pay for any sweets and the sea was in London.”

“So you could swim in it?”

“Whenever we liked. And I wish there was only children in the world.”

“What about me?”

“Except for you and mummy.”

“Why do you love me then?”

“Because you’re so nice and you take me out for walks.”

“And what else?”

“I told you yesterday. You’re always asking me the same things.” Deborah climbed up and sat on his knee.

“You don’t believe in God, do you?”

“You know I don’t.”

“Mummy does.”

“Most ladies do.”

“Our teacher says you must think God is love.”

“Something like that.” He laughed.

“Well, you’re silly because you must believe in God because God made the world. Because God’s God. I had a nightmare last night. I was frightened. I wanted to come up to your bed.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“I will next time. Whose bed can I go in when you’re away?”

“Penny’s.”

“Her mummy says we can sleep in the same bed if we want to.”

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"But did you tell me about the nightmare so you could come up to my bed?"

"Yes," said the little girl and they both laughed again and hugged each other again.

"So what was the nightmare about?"

"I dreamed that the Queen dropped her baby and it fell in the pavement and only the baby's head came out."

"Oh. It was a real nightmare then?"

"I told you it was."

"You know partly why you dreamt that?"

"No."

"Look out there." Halliday pointed down and across the road to where some workmen were digging up the pavement.

"Oh yes," said the little girl, "oh yes, I go past them to school."

"There's your setting," said Halliday. "But where the content of a dream comes from . . . well . . . that's another matter."

"What does that mean?" asked Deborah. So Halliday began to try to tell her.

There was only one thing he had to do before he thought he was finally divorced from Africa and that was to find someone qualified and prepared to take over the salvaging of the negroes in the long ward in Katopos. It did not prove easy to find a man suitable and gifted enough for the undertaking who was willing to leave London. But just before he left for his holiday in Ireland with Aileen he thought he had succeeded.

He found a man called Berridge, a fat little man in his early thirties who had been in general practice in the East

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End of London before he had specialised in psychiatry. They met several times that week.

“There’s nothing organically wrong,” Halliday said at their last meeting.

“I long to see them.”

“When could you go?”

“In the Spring.”

“Have you a family?”

“No children. I’ll take my wife with me.”

“Should you go I’ll give you a cheque for five hundred pounds. It will cover your fares if you travel the cheapest way and then you’ll always have a return ticket in your pocket.”

“I’ll go.”

“The hospital will look after you when you arrive but I’m afraid your salary will be very small.”

“I’m not doing it for the money. Why don’t you come out with us?”

“No. You’ll have a free hand.” Halliday passed over Miss Armitage’s cheque. “I’ve endorsed it. I’ve written the donor’s address on the back. I think it might be a good idea if you dropped the old lady a note and told her how her money’s being spent.”

“Thank you. I will. You’d like me to write to you too, eh? Tell you how things are going.”

“No. Write me if you succeed.”

“That may be ages.”

“If at all. Do you think that you would have broken up their natural state if you had found yourself in Manda as I did?” Berridge did not hesitate: “I’m sure I would. But perhaps not so quickly. I think I would have concentrated on the children and left the old to continue their ways.”

“It was a starving community.”

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“Yes. But that was a different problem, wasn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Halliday. “Of course that’s true. I’m afraid I got so caught up in it all that I didn’t always think very clearly. I went bull-headed at it and not as a doctor should.”

“I’m not criticising you.”

“I feel now that not all minds are suited to such tasks.”

“Oh look here,” said Berridge, “of course you were right to try—only some half-witted anthropologist would have left them as they were. My only point was that it would have been better to get food to them where they were and so have proceeded more gradually in the treatment. Besides, it’s all very well for me to talk sitting here in London and in the hind-light of events. Good God, you found them and it’s men like you who get things moving.”

“You see,” said Halliday reluctantly, “while I am aware that all this became an obsession with me so that I forgot about everything else—my other patients for instance—and while I think that most of the things I did were seemingly justified at the time . . .” he hesitated, “I mean I was never deliberately cruel . . . I do think . . . well I think that some of my actions were determined by a ‘lack’ in myself.”

“What do you mean?”

“I find it hard to explain myself better. And am only beginning to see something of this myself. This ‘lack’, as I call it, is within me, but why, and what its complexities are, as I say I am only beginning to understand. I remember Doctor da Gama once wrote me something about my loving my patients too much because I so desired to be loved. Something . . . something of that did seem to occur. I feel when I look back sometimes that I was as much a servant as the servants of Manda.”

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"Aren't we all," said Berridge dryly.

"But a servant of this 'lack,'" said Halliday nervously.

"Because of this disease within, I too have been prisoner.

Do you follow me?"

"Not altogether. At least I find it hard to relate this 'lack'—as you call it—or comprehend its uniqueness."

"Perhaps I will never understand it completely," said Halliday.

"Perhaps not."

"And perhaps I should ask your attendance in a professional capacity."

"The thing is," said Berridge slowly, "a man like you has to sort these things out for himself. There's nothing I nor anyone else can do for you. You're too intelligent for it to be otherwise."

"Except love me," said Halliday with an ironic smile.

"Even so," said Berridge.

"Other people do help, can help."

"Only to a point."

"Well I know," said Halliday. "My thinking is less obsessional than it was." He smiled again.

"Good," said Berridge and rose to shake hands. "Will I see you again before I leave?"

"Yes, when we come back from Ireland."

As they stood at the front door Halliday said quickly: "It's different out there you know. So be just with them. Never underrate them because they're different. They go very deep when you find the way. If they are like children sometimes, then they're as deep and as vulnerable as children. You know how time is different for a child than it is for you and me—how much longer it seems the years are—so it is for them. And whatever you do be patient. Don't overwork yourself as I did or you'll lose perspective.

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Keep faith with your calling always. I . . . I don't want to presume. Forgive me if I have presumed . . . it's just that in our profession we must never, never take things for granted . . . and none of us must confine ourselves too closely to a part and neglect the whole. So . . . oh well, good luck."

"Thank you. And to you." Berridge hesitated. "I do wish you'd come with us—it would be such a help."

"You're just like Smith. You really won't believe I'm finished with Africa."

There was a pause. Then: "I want your notes," said Berridge. "Oh yes," said Halliday. "how stupid of me"; and went to get them. When he returned he noticed Berridge was gazing at him intently. He averted his eyes. "I suppose," he said, "there is no disease of which a more complete description could not be written, and no symptom that has been completely explored."

"I suppose not."

"Don't substitute another symptom as I did."

"I'll try not. But you won't come and help?"

"You're nothing if not persistent," said Halliday. "Goodbye." Then: "Don't be arrogant with them," he added pathetically.

"I hope Debbie'll be all right without me," said Ailcen. "I've never left her without me before."

"Of course," he said.

At last they were away. No-one could intrude. No letters, no telegrams, no Berridges, no Boyd Smiths. It was what he wanted.

"I think perhaps I've just imagined you," he said. "Perhaps you're not here at all."

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“Perhaps I’m not,” she answered. Then: “Yes, I’m here.” She squeezed his hand.

He held on to her hand. He was sitting by the window and looked down at the white clouds. All those times alone of weeping, of weeping at one’s helplessness, or exhaustion, or lack of talent, or guilt, or at ironies, unhelpful coincidences, injustices, and pain, were like the white clouds, were as dreams. Below the plane these dreams lay insubstantial if deep—insubstantial if vast. The sun shone on to the clouds, both from below and above, pierced and threaded these drifting clouds, and drifting with them he could see so many of his friends, and some of them, living and dead, walked on these white clouds and were still walking as the plane, with the green painted emblem of Ireland, descended through the clouds and landed at Dublin Airport.

But the snow had returned and in that shabby genteel city, that European capital where Aileen had told him you could still see bare-footed children begging in the streets, they were informed they would never get through to Galway where Aileen had lived, which he was so anxious to see, because the snow had blocked the roads.

So they drove North in the dusk. Out of the city. The driver assured them it was an excellent hotel.

“You were far more eager to see it all than me anyway,” she said, laughing.

“I thought I’d learn more of you.”

“You look tired. The years have tired you more than you realise.”

“It’s the inconsistencies and paradoxes that get you down.”

The car was so quiet in the snow. The headlights lit up the flakes so that they danced. They were enclosed. In

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spite of the silent driver they were more private than in a locked room. It was beautiful. It was beautiful for them to be going somewhere together. Somewhere alone. And crowded in by the snow flakes.

“You know my father was drowned when I was eleven,” he said. “And my mother died when I was seventeen.”

The snow still covered the ground outside and lay thick in corners. They lay side by side in a bed. Sometimes they read books. Sometimes the sun shone into the room, sometimes it was dark. They laughed a lot. Told each other stories of their lives—filled in the long gaps.

“It was my grandfather who paid for me at Guy’s,” he said.

They chatted to the Irish maid who brought them their meals. Occasionally they got up and went out for a walk.

“Imagine what it’s like in the Spring,” said Aileen.

They stood by a gate at the corner of a lane. A cart went by. “Yes,” said Halliday. “I’m glad we came here. I wonder how long the snow will last. I feel we ought to go when it thaws. I don’t want to see this countryside anything but covered in snow.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know yet. I must find some kind of interesting job. Let’s not talk about it. Let’s go to the West coast in the summer. All right?”

“All right,” said Aileen.

In the room it was quiet and warm. He was gazing at the ceiling. He knew he would have to find another job.

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What was she thinking? He turned his head and he watched her. Her eyes were closed. Did she know he was watching her? She opened her eyes and smiled. "You're a modest woman," he said humorously, and meant it.

"The room's so quiet," said Aileen. "The sheets are like silk."

They looked at each other with curious eyes, with real eyes.

"Your skin has got whiter," he said.

Nothing was denied; nothing was imposed. They understood. They had learned. They had discovered each other's rhythms. He thought the situation was complete.

Towards the end in that warm room they rarely spoke. He told himself over and over again that this was what happiness was. In the dark he noticed she kept her eyes closed. In fact the room was lost—it was only they that were essential. Both needed and were needed. He never moved away abruptly, always lingered. They had desire and respect. They wanted each other but each knew that they were free. Sometimes she submitted, sometimes he. They were constantly aware. They saw each other fully as flesh and blood. Halliday thought no relationship between a man and a woman could be more whole than this.

But it was thawing fast and although on his last day in Ireland he knew without sadness or inferiority he could give this woman pleasure by a look; although he knew he had been loved at last; although he felt that nothing remained to be proved in this aspect of living—that love was all he had ever imagined and more; although all these things had been explored and confirmed, he had made a

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shattering discovery. He had realised even such love as this was not enough for him.

The discovery would not have been so shattering or unexpected to anyone else perhaps, but to him at this point it was overwhelming. It had after all been his greatest illusion.

The realisation had come gradually and had various aspects. What was especially bewildering was the knowledge that ultimately *he* was not capable of love like her. And he never would be. He saw that his nature was different from hers. And what was more, he did not want to change his nature. It was not that he was bored: he saw that he was not a man who could go on giving his whole energies to a single relationship. Or to a woman. It seemed incredible that he had ever thought he could. He knew what she had done for him; no-one had ever done more or ever could. He knew how much he had gained. He knew he could never love another more. He was shattered.

It was all so obvious. And obvious as it was, the discovery seemed the most important of his life. He wished he had made it long before. He wished he had more of her capacity, but paradoxically did not want to change.

He could not sleep that last night. He wasn't sad, he was simply bewildered by this further realisation; he kept repeating to himself how obvious it all had been.

He got up and stood by the window looking out into the still darkness. Aileen was breathing deeply. He felt so restless. His body had begun to ache in the most unexpected places. From pondering on the future he began to imagine death. What exactly it would be like in his case and how

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he would look. And how his face would strike others in ten years' time. Where would he die? And what would he do next? He looked out at the darkness, he peered at the thin branches on the elm trees. He thought he saw his father's face in those branches. He went on looking till the thin branches stirred slightly and the dawn came and Aileen woke up.

She slept on his shoulder in the plane. The clouds above and below were different clouds from those they had passed through before. So was he different! At least he supposed the clouds were different, one was always told so, but might they not be the same clouds wandering round and round the earth always with the same questions on their lips, momentarily changing their shapes as momentarily they discovered an answer. "There are no answers," he muttered. "Not even half truths. Nothing is absolute. All is subjective. One discovers one's tastes, that's all. And one's palate changes like one's skin." For some reason he thought of his grandfather's view that the world was a labyrinthine wilderness, and civilisation but a canopy which you are a fool not to take advantage of, get underneath, enjoy, and find shelter while you may. "All days run to the grave," his grandfather used to say with relish.

But it was not *her* fault he felt thus. He looked down at the sleeping face. Did she know? He loved that face. There were moments still when all that mattered to him was to put his arms around her and draw her close and comfort himself. But it wasn't fair. For her sake he knew he must end it soon. And for his own. In another time they might have gone a longer way together—perhaps if he had been

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loved so when younger there might not have been such an end—such an abrupt end. What was he planning? He couldn't have said. It was something *within* him that was insistent he should move on. He looked out at the clouds. How long did it take a man to *begin* to know himself.

It was Spring. In London the windows were open in the drawing-room. The birds sang sharply, sang hoarsely, sounded as if already they needed a rest. Across the road the men walking in the park were carrying their jackets on their arms. It was a cheerful sunny morning with all the windows open everywhere, the flowers blowing, the children shouting and on holiday from school.

Inside the drawing-room the sun fell in sharp wedges, fell on Halliday and Aileen as they sat smoking together, sat looking at the park. When Aileen was nervous she had a habit of rubbing the fingers of her right hand up and down the lines of her forehead. She was doing so now.

Across the road they could see Deborah playing with her friends the Ashmore children. The children started to run races. .

“You want to go away, don’t you?”

Halliday did not answer.

“You want to go away by yourself, don’t you?”

He sighed as if a burden had fallen from his shoulders.

“Yes,” he said.

“Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“I wanted to be sure.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why not stay with me till you do know?”

Halliday turned his chair so that he faced her directly.

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He looked at her for a long time before beginning slowly: "I have to move on—it's a question of need. I don't know if I'm more alone than you are—I think I am—but I know I've lost most of my self-reliance and have to get some of it back."

Aileen was so silent and pre-occupied that it seemed for a moment as if she had not heard him, but then: "I wish you believed in God," she said.

"If I did, it wouldn't arise," said Halliday. "Then I wouldn't be dependent on my own humanity, would I?"

They were silent again for perhaps five minutes.

"Do you think people are the only conscious things?" she asked.

"Yes."

The church clock struck eleven. "I hope you're wrong," she said with a sad smile. The sun moved behind a cloud so that it grew colder in the room.

"You know," said Halliday, "when you meet someone whose experience has little in common with your own but who has been studying the same events, someone whose fundamental assumptions are not your own, that person often surprises you into a fresh look at what had seemed obvious. I need to meet more such people. I feel I've been living out of my times and I want to try to catch up."

Across the road he saw that Deborah had lost the first race because towards the end she kept looking back. And the men lying on the grass sat up and were looking uneasily towards the sky.

"Why wouldn't you take me with you?"

"Because I don't love you in the way you love me."

"But many people don't love each other equally. I don't care about that."

"The point is that I care very much," said Halliday.

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Some of the men in the park got disappointedly to their feet and began to put on their jackets.

"If everything about me still seems inconsistent and unreliable," said Halliday, "it's not as it was . . . I mean it's not as it *was* before we met. At least I'm beginning to be honest and to understand self-deception. You've taught me something of that."

"How have I?"

"By the way you are."

In the road below there was a bang as a driver tried to manœuvre his car into a small space in the parked row. Several people gathered round to give him advice. Some were laughing.

"You'll be better off without me," he said and took her hand away from her forehead and held it in his own. "I have to get away and be alone."

When she finished her cigarette he took it from her and got up to throw it in the fire. He stood looking down at her. "You know, Aileen," he said, "I always thought that I preferred people who knew when they were lying—providing they had reasonable motives for lying—to those who simply didn't know. I never much cared for people who seemed to lie from the heart of themselves as it were—from their souls if you like. And I used to think there was a pretty fair division you could make in people there. I still do too. Well, I always knew when I was lying but what I've suddenly realised is that I didn't know when I was telling the truth."

The sun was still hidden from the clouds. She shivered. She started to rub her forehead again with her hand.

"There's a difference," said Halliday. "I begin to understand the difference. And it wasn't so much a question of telling the truth as believing things to be true that were

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emotionally necessary and convenient. Not lies, you understand—truths. I'm not using the word in its correct sense but I mean believing things, standing for things, that *are* good. I paid several of these things more than lip-service but the point is that I really hadn't thought what I was doing. I didn't understand why I was doing these things, or believing these things, in a proper way."

"What do you mean, Ben?" she asked wearily.

"I mean," he answered quietly, "that it's time for me to re-assess. Not only the bad things I've done but the good things too. Why did I do them? I'm sure so many things went wrong because I never really understood what I thought."

Some of the sun was now revealed so that it shone on the square and the front of the house and into the room where she sat. But he was still in the shadows. For a moment the brilliant light dazzled his eyes as he looked at her. The sun poured over her like a liquid.

"Christ you look beautiful." He forgot what he had been saying. "That you have loved me so much has shown me I'm worth loving," he said as if this was an entirely new thought.

"I'm glad of that." She turned her head away and looked out at the sky.

"Aileen," said Halliday gently. "I know I'm very boring. But . . . I must reach for something better and I can only do it by myself. That's the sort of man I am. I want to go on shedding illusions but not hopes. I was so arrogant because I was so insecure—you've helped me most to lose some of *that* arrogance."

She turned her head and he saw that she was making a desperate effort not to cry. "But what about me?" she asked.

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He moved to her chair, knelt beside her and took her hands in his own.

“You’ll be all right.” He almost whispered it. “I promise you you’re stronger than me.” They stayed there staring. Suddenly he stood up and demanded: “Do you know what I think of you?”

“What?”

“You’re a good person . . . you’re real. I mean I’m like some bloody statue—marvellous appearance and hollow inside. Not enough of the essentials. But you . . . you’re real and I don’t know whether you know it or not. I don’t know if you understand how you do it or not, but you are. You’ll die like everyone else but somehow you’re permanent too. Like Alejo was. And it doesn’t matter what you say but what you *do* is authoritative and it speaks. People like you frighten me sometimes. I know you’re so much better than me.”

“You’re silly, Ben,” she said as if he was a child.

“There are things of perfection and reality,” he said wistfully. “I know there are.”

“Am I too possessive?”

He looked down at her again. “But it’s not you at all,” he said. “Don’t you understand. It’s me. You *must* understand that. It’s me that’s lacking. If I stay any longer we’ll be unhappy because of *me*.”

Once again she turned her head away from him so that he could not see her face. “Suppose,” he heard her say nervously, “you went back to Africa and I went with you . . . you’d work again and I’d be there in the evenings.”

“No,” said Halliday. “Why do you all think I’ve got to face up to Africa? That part’s done with.”

“I don’t think it is.”

“Anyway, you couldn’t take Deborah there.”

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Aileen suddenly turned and shouted at him: "I can't live all my life for my children!"

They were both shocked. She because she had realised the depths of her misery, he because he had realised them too. Her control had deceived Halliday. Once again he saw an enormous difference in their natures but he knew that something hard within him would not allow him to give way to hers, whatever tenderness he might feel. Somewhere something within him was grinding at him, insisting he had things to do without her, and, whatever the cost to them both, must break free. It was nothing to do with her attraction for him—she had never attracted him more.

"Aileen," he said wretchedly but without moving. "I have to go. After a while you'll see I was right. And I won't go back to Africa."

"No. You're not ready to go back to Africa," she said as wretchedly as he.

Presently the sun disappeared again. Aileen said she felt cold and went to put on a jersey. He wanted to comfort her but for a while could not help but stay where he was, looking out at the park. The children were still running races.

And upstairs although she was crying when she was putting on her jersey Aileen had many thoughts that did comfort her. She had made herself akin to him she knew. Somehow this bond or love of hers was not a sympathy of the mind only, or of the mind and the body—as he had once said: "Such sympathy is not so hard"—but for her was of the heart. That it was not altogether the same for him, she knew. Had known it longer than he. And in this respect she was sorry for him, not for herself.

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And her understanding of him did help to prepare her for the parting. She understood his 'lack'. She wished she'd had more time. She loved this man and was sorry for him. She thought also of her child. And wished she'd given him one. If she had been pregnant it could not have ended so. She knew how much he wanted *that*. She wished she could have done more for him. Perhaps he would return. And in a sense she could not lose him. Would never lose him.

And why this woman should feel so strongly, as she did this morning, that even in their most passionate moments of happiness, their wildest moments, she had deepened rather than evaded or lost her feeling of belonging to the world, and to other people, she could not have said. But she did feel this. She knew it and it helped. This sense of compatibility was to be held on to—she knew that also. She must hold on to it. She would hold on to it. Yes, she knew she was very different from him.

So she put on her jersey, washed her face, brushed her hair, went back to the room and sat down again beside him. She was, in so many ways, the stronger. She couldn't help feeling there was something pathetic about him. She did not reproach him again.

She managed to keep her calm until he left. And after. She knew what she was missing, she felt she had not had the best of luck. She knew she had to live. She knew she'd had no choice but to give him up. She thought that for him there was nothing left but his own kind of service. She hoped he would find it. She did not cry at the station.

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◆ 2 ◆

HE was standing by a book-stall in Hamburg. It was late Summer. There then occurred one of those chance happenings that was to change the course of his life once more.

He had been wandering in France and Germany ever since leaving Aileen Joyce in London in the early Spring, and now, since his funds were running low and the harvesting was over, had come into the town to find himself another job.

There was something about the character of the German people that depressed him this morning. Perhaps it was their industry or simply the purposeful way that everyone about him was going about their business. Everyone here seemed to know exactly what life was all about, and to be getting on with it. It may have been an illusion, but illusion or not the surrounding atmosphere bustled and throbbed in high contrast to the passive, almost inert, world within his head. And then too it was another of those mornings when he found it difficult to look at the simplest object and see it for what it was: he had just eaten a piece of toast and had drunk a cup of tea and he had had the greatest difficulty in managing either, for the toast concealed a platoon of malevolent insects about to march off the plate, and the paper cup was filled with African swamp water immediately he had raised it to his lips. Such distractions were common early in the day and as usual he tried to ignore them, but they did interfere with his concentration, and they rendered him unable to appreciate the pleasantest of surroundings. Not that Hamburg railway station fell into this category exactly. He was aware of the vacant expression on his face.

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Lying alone in a bed in a shabby hotel the night before, he had decided for the hundredth time to return to Aileen next day, but as usual when the morning came the decision had no validity, and in fact he knew himself to have moved further and further away from such a return. It seemed ironic to him that after months of travel, of constant physical movement, and after months of deliberately engaging himself in conversation at every opportunity and of listening so intently to human comment, informed and otherwise, he should find himself this morning in a German railway station more immobile, and more detached from people, than ever in his life before except for those days of guilt and realisation immediately succeeding Kamante's death.

It was stifling hot. He sat down on a bench for a moment, watching everyone. It was a new bench, but such had been the Summer's heat the wood was already beginning to warp. He took no notice of the fact that the bench had turned into a hollowed log. Unsmilingly he contemplated buying a newspaper, rolling it up and paddling off.

So there he sat on a bench in Hamburg station wearily, dazedly, taking stock. There were so many sides to every question—the political and social problems he had heard discussed seemed insuperable. His happiest days since leaving Aileen had been days when he had helped some farmer to harvest and had thus been simply engaged. But even in the harvest field he lacked concentration, and there too his tortured imagination, with its ridiculous and complex images, was apt to run full rein. He had thought humorously once or twice that if he could have painted some of these images he might find himself famous one morning and grow rich.

In spite of the heat he was beginning to feel himself

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some human symbol of the 'cold' war—a human slowly being frozen. He was filled with conventional opinions: that soon there might be another conflict that no-one wanted; that personal prides and vanities still ruled supreme though the world was moving so fast individual rulers could not keep pace with it; that democracies could still recover from their mistakes—and it was in their nature to make many—but one mistake of a totalitarian state might be absolute; that he, Halliday, could not in any way affect such issues, and was as far from salvation, or rather from purpose, as ever. But how had he expected otherwise, he asked himself? The situation around him did in fact seem to be the most complete vindication of religion yet, but it was not an observation that inspired him in any way. He believed as he had before that men must make their own judgments and wished whole-heartedly that somehow or other he himself might regain impetus. He longed to regain an environment in which he moved with creative ideas and values, concrete duties and purposes. And he longed to re-capture the interest of deducing from and contemplating experience, as you go along. He had wished these things before!

It was then his luck turned. The man sitting on the bench beside him got up to catch his train, thrust a copy of the *Daily Express* into Halliday's hand and said in English: "You ought to read that, mate."

"Thank you," said Halliday in the same language.

"A pleasure, mate," said the traveller and hurried off.

Halliday glanced at the paper. On the front page was a story of a Russian seaman swimming to sanctuary in the Shetlands. Immediately his thoughts turned North. A tremendous nostalgia and a longing to visit Orkney where he had lived as a boy took hold of him—to see this place of

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which he had so often talked and dreamed and from which so many of his romantic images were drawn.

He stood up; he hesitated. A train arrived. The travellers scurried like ants. With the nostalgia had come a fear that the place might be small and shabby and boring, and therefore another illusion would be discovered, another part of him destroyed. And larger than that fear loomed a further one: that he would meet older men and women who would confirm his opinion of his father—that figure who so haunted him, whose image he seemed to grow daily nearer, and whom in his heart he had despised so deeply and so long.

He glanced again at the paper: 'Sanctuary!' He smiled: it must be an omen. As far as he knew there was no equivalent for the word in German. The sailor had swum to the shore. Halliday had always been superstitious when it suited him. He chuckled, he calculated his financial assets, and took the next boat to England.

He hired a jeep for the drive North. It was cheaper and it was what he was used to. At first he had thought of walking, and then of going by plane, but finally had decided that since he was feeling so vulnerable and excited the first means of travel would be too slow and the second too fast.

It was not until he drove North of Inverness that Halliday began to feel at home. He was a man who was affected by places more than he realised. His thoughts took on a different rhythm: he might have prescribed such a change for a neurotic patient.

The further he went North, the more he was set at peace by the land and the temperament of its inhabitants. He felt that the land was in sympathy with him and would have spoken comfort had it been able. He was seeing it at

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its best: the sun shone, no rain and no mist. Incredibly this Summer continued. And the evenings grew lighter as he went.

On a Wednesday morning, just before noon, he drove down the narrow hill road into Scrabster in time to catch the *St. Ola*. Some boys were water-skiing in the harbour. It was a new *St. Ola*. He saw that right away. As they lowered his jeep into the hold he repeatedly glanced at the man working the winch. Did he know this man?

When the boat was under way and he walked past an old seaman painting a ventilator on the upper deck he hesitated in case the man might wish to address him and say: "You're John Halliday's son Benjamin." But no such incident occurred.

He descended from the upper deck and went up in the bows to stand there alone peering ahead as the ship slid up and down in the sea. The wind whipped into his face. A cleansing wind. Now and again he would rest from the wind and sit on a coil of rope below the bows but not for long; he could not restrain himself, he must stand and peer eagerly ahead.

He had not realised how close to Scotland the islands were; the distances had looked twice as large when he was a boy. And it was hard to imagine this calm morning that the dark blue sea around them could turn almost as fearsome as any on earth.

They were heading straight up the Flow. Not straight, but winding circuitously in and out of the southern islands so that these islands took on a different shape every five or ten minutes. He did not think that the old *St. Ola* had taken this course. He turned round and looked up at the

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bridge: he had the sensation that the Captain was watching him intently.

The sea grew darker between the islands. A cormorant emerged a hundred paces ahead. He looked for a seal's head or the fin of a basking shark. The mast-heads of the scuttled German fleet were gone. On the shore where the salvage men had lived, great oil tanks stood silent and deserted. In the centre of the deserted island on his left a man could build a house and live alone.

The ship moved on. He turned his head to see if the Captain was observing him and was startled that behind him the old deck-hand was coiling rope. "Aye aye," said the old man politely and went on with his work. Halliday could only just resist the impulse to say: "I'm Benjamin Halliday, did you know my father?" What he did say was: "The Flow's very calm today."

"Aye," said the old man. "It is that."

He looked ahead. In spite of his disquiet as he neared Stromness he wished that somehow he could pick up this old town and hug it to him. Whatever else, he was not disillusioned by his surroundings! The town was so small and so identifiable. It was intimate, it was indestructible, and had hardly changed at all. It perfectly suited its surroundings. It was experienced and weathered and real. It was aristocratic. And yet here his father turned melancholic.

They entered the narrow harbour. He saw that this harbour he had thought so vast and so safe was minute—not much bigger than a lagoon. And yet he'd known twenty trawlers sheltering safe inside. And it was half a mile from his slip-way to the Holms. But where were the boys rowing to slide over the *St. Ola's* wake?

"There's not so many sailing boats in the harbour now," he said to the deckhand.

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"Ah, the young people they don't take no interest in sailing now," said the old man. "And it's not economic to fish that way. Course the steads are larger and better worked. That's what is it."

And Halliday looked up at the land beyond the little town and saw that indeed what once was peat and heather had been put to plough and the crofts were little houses.

"No more sailing races?"

"Very rare."

"No trees though."

"No. No trees," said the old man with pride.

On the quayside he got into the unloaded jeep and drove to the Stromness hotel—a matter of fifty yards. The boys were diving into the sea as he drove down the pier; there was a fat boy who could have been Colin Tait's grandson.

As he parked in front of the hotel he saw that the main street of Stromness was as narrow as before, but here and there was a new shop front. He wondered if the town was still 'dry'. But it was not the familiar street that concerned him. He sat for a while looking into his driving mirror at the group by the Harbour Master's office: a group of old fishermen and boys who lounged and sat there during the long light evenings, and conversed just as they had always done. All eyes watched him—everyone was waiting for him to descend. He was sure they knew him, even the boys. It was almost unbearable.

He got out of the jeep. He started to walk towards them, but changed his mind. He walked instead down the tiny street. And this street was so tiny that after twenty paces he realised he was standing outside the front door of their house. The door was still painted the same colour—dark red. He wanted to go in.

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The door opened and a man staggered out carrying a television set. He nodded politely to Halliday: "Aye, aye," he said.

Sensing how conspicuous he must look standing there so self-consciously, red-haired and sunburned, wearing a pair of blue French trousers and a check German shirt, he turned back towards the hotel. And now he had the sensation that the people he passed on the way back deliberately chose to ignore him, averted their eyes, gazed studiously into the shop windows. A conspiracy of silence! He wasn't standing for that. His father hadn't done any of them any harm. He walked up to the group at the pier and said aggressively: "Good evening."

They answered him politely that it was. And that was all. Discomfited he turned on his heel, went into the hotel and booked himself a room.

The hotel was almost empty. "No-one expected this weather to last I suppose," said the manager. And he saw that there was a Bar. "No, we're not dry here now," said the manager, who was not an Orkney man.

Sitting on the little balcony outside his bedroom window, gazing out at the roof-tops, the harbour, and the holms across the way, he calmed himself and began to smile—that he should care so much after all these years! He sat and grew peaceful. Occasionally snatches of conversation from the group on the pier drifted up to his window but he could not see the speakers nor hear precisely what was said.

He sat. He knew he could not put into words how a part of his nature was being restored by the scene before him. There was a knock on the door—it was the manager.

"There's a gentleman downstairs who'd like to see you, sir."

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“Me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What’s his name?”

“Mr. Porteous.”

He felt his heart pound. “Mr. Archie Porteous?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Will you show him up?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And send me up a bottle of whisky and some glasses.”

“Yes, sir.”

Halliday stood there pretending to himself that there was nothing to get worked up about, but he knew in his heart there was: Archie Porteous and Colin Tait had been his father’s best friends—his father’s drinking companions.

He waited. Who was going to appear? An old drunk? An old drunk who would leer at him, pat him on the shoulder, break into maudlin tears? And dog him during his stay in the Islands?

Down the corridor he heard a slow, firm tread. Then a discreet knock. “Come in,” said Halliday. The old man who entered was dressed in a suit and wore a tie and a stiff white collar. His grey hair was carefully brushed, he gave the impression of great personal cleanliness. He was a dignified old man.

He stood elegantly at the door: “I’d have known you right away, Benjamin,” he said. His voice was lilting and gentle. He was not at all what Halliday had expected.

“But you haven’t seen me since I was ten.”

“You’re your father’s son.”

Am I, thought Halliday grimly. There was a pause.

“You have the same expression in the eyes.”

“How did you know I was here?” Halliday asked.

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“Word got round. Several knew you.”

“Ah. I wondered. You’ll have a drink with me? I’ve sent down for some whisky.”

“No thank you. I don’t drink.”

“You ‘don’t’!” Halliday was astonished.

“I haven’t had a drop since your father went. He always maintained it didn’t suit me.” This was a surprising piece of information. “But don’t let me stop you.”

“It doesn’t suit me either,” said Halliday dryly.

There was another pause. They stood. Halliday had become so distracted he forgot to ask the old man to seat himself.

“And Colin Tait,” said Halliday, “what of him?”

“On his last legs,” said Porteous sadly. “But then he’s been on them for some time. A most remarkable constitution. Can’t keep his food down now. In fact he doesn’t eat. I went to see him today. Gin’s his food. He took to the gin.”

“Ah.”

“And how’ve you been keeping, Benjamin?”

“I’m fine.”

“You look well enough but a wee bit tired.”

“That’s the driving.”

“Aye. I’ve read about you from time to time.”

“Have you?”

“You’ll not think us Philistines up here.”

“I don’t.”

“We’re the most civilised community in Europe,” said Porteous, smiling. “People from the South are always surprised, but you should remember it.”

“I do,” said Halliday.

There was a knock on the door and a maid entered carrying the glasses and the whisky.

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“Might we go for a walk together,” said the old man.
‘It’s a fine night.’

As they proceeded through the town to the cliffs at the South End Archie Porteous told Halliday who was living where, who was still alive, and who was dead. Halliday did not in fact remember half the people the old man thought he should.

“Have you retired?” asked Halliday.

“No. I’ll not do that. I don’t believe a man should.”

“So what do you do?”

“I work for the museum. I watch birds and such-like. I had an article in *The Geographical Magazine*.”

“You did?”

“Aye. I’ll give it you to read.”

When they got out of the town and had passed through the golf-course the old man paused: “You walk exactly like your father, you know. I could tell your walk a mile off.”

“Yes.”

“Same sort of roll. One would think you’d been to sea.”

“Yes.”

“Of course you’re a bigger man. But then your mother was tall.”

They walked on. Although it was after ten and the sun itself was not visible, a huge patch of sunlight streamed down from the clouds above on to the sea and the island of Hoy across the Sound. In the air the light was golden, but as it reached the water it turned pink and mauve and beyond the water the hills were purple. Halliday sighed.

“You’ve not forgotten the sunsets,” said the old man with satisfaction.

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They stood still and looked. There was no-one else on the path. How prodigal of Nature to present this scene solely for us, thought Halliday. This kind of night compensates for almost everything. How lucky he was to have formed his images here.

The light grew brighter. And yet an hour ago the sun had seemed to have gone till the morning.

“It’s so very peaceful.”

“Aye.”

“But there’s a kind of sadness about this place.”

“Maybe because so many have gone lost here,” said old Porteous.

“That must be it.”

“Ah, it’s seen so much.” Halliday saw that the old seaman’s gnarled hands were covered with woollen mittens and now he was tugging at his chin as if he was wearing a beard. He turned and gazed intently at Halliday and remarked: “Like your father before, you seem to have suffered.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Your lids droop over your eyes as his did and your eyes glow. So you seem to be brooding. And your head’s set heavy on your shoulders and they hunch about your ears. Aye, you’re like John.”

“Let’s walk on,” said Halliday abruptly.

They continued along the cliff path in silence. In the sea immediately beneath, flocks of eider duck were paddling in and out of the rocks. The waves were hissing and swirling around these black rocks and from the Sound itself, far out, could be heard a faint roar as though the seabed sloped here for the waters of the North to pour down and through the Channel into the Islands.

They reached the cemetery so far from the town. No

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houses stood near. It was a place of its own. And to the landward side of this place a solitary road swept down through cornfields over the brow of the hill. Halliday looked over the stone wall from the cliffside—looked at the aged stones, at the Victorian marbles, and at the new. He read some of the inscriptions. ‘To Duncan Clouston, drowned at sea, from his loving wife Elisabeth, 1829.’

“My mother put up a stone to my father in Ladock in Cornwall,” he said.

“I told her it should have been here,” said old Porteous. “But she wouldn’t have it.”

“You were right,” said Halliday.

“She never came back to see us,” said the old man sadly.

“She hated the place.”

“Aye. No doubt she had reason.” They were silent again.

“Of course,” said old Porteous, “there’s two sides to everything.” There was something in his tone that made Halliday ask: “Didn’t you like her then?”

“It wasn’t that I didn’t like her,” said Porteous slowly. “It was that I didn’t like her on account of him.”

“What do you mean?”

The old man didn’t answer immediately: he seemed lost in thought. Halliday repeated the question.

“You see, Benjamin,” he said, “she fought him cat and dog. Most sympathised with her entirely, but not all. Not those, I think, who knew. She was a Cornish woman, a direct woman, an upright woman, but to my mind no judge of character. She was like her father and he was a hard man. I sailed under him you know. A teetotaller and all, the Captain was. He had a fine sense of humour but sometimes he was hard. He didn’t understand his son-in-law

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and no more did the son-in-law's wife. And it wasn't so much that they was hard but they was hard with your father at the wrong time. And to this day for the life of me I don't know why. I loved your father."

For a while Halliday could only gaze out at the Sound his father had sailed so often. The last time he and his father had walked along this cliff path together was to see the stranded whale on Warbeth beach. The revelatory character of the old man's words opened up such a fever of thought within him that he shivered. And he shivered with anxiety that he might be dreaming in some lonely bedroom and wake to find old Porteous gone. He gripped the old man by the arm. "What didn't they understand about my father?" he demanded.

"Your mother wouldn't be companionable with him—which was what he wanted. She wouldn't drink with him. Wouldn't go out. So when he needed to drink, and had to, he'd get to feeling guilty since she wasn't there and then drink some more to forget her. She wouldn't give way. I don't say as she drove him to it, and what went on between them alone we'll never know, but to my mind she went about things wrong."

"But why did he need to drink?"

"Ah well—why does anyone? You're a doctor, you tell me." Porteous sighed. "He was lonely for her but he was proud. It was the bloody war that done him up. And you see she always said he shouldn't have made so much of the war. She said he should have forgotten it. But he couldn't forget the war. He was a man things preyed on. It wasn't just one reason—it wasn't just the war—it was something he'd arrived at she didn't understand. No more did he. It was an outlook on life he had—there's many more like him now. I told you you have a similar look."

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“But what happened to him in the war? He never spoke of it to me.”

“Well he’d think you too young, wouldn’t he, Benjamin? Eh?” Porteous shook his head. “You’d have got on well I imagine. It was a pity that drowning. He was in the army in the war you know—never should have been. I don’t know how it come about he got in the army but he did.” Once again the old seaman paused, lost in nostalgic thought.

“And what happened in the army?” said Halliday urgently.

“The poor fellow was in a poison gas attack—he was a sergeant then. The attack was launched by us, and after it was over it was your father’s duty to take a detail of men down into a valley and put out of misery them Germans that was left. He was particularly haunted by the memory of an old German soldier who got up from his trench when he saw the cloud of gas and had walked forward straight into the cloud. It was a deliberate protest against anything so evil, your father said. And he said too that it was not until that time that he really understood what war had become. He told me often if he had had the courage he would have laid down his arms there and then and refused to fight more. But he didn’t have the courage and that haunted him later too. He always said something broke in him in that gas-filled valley with all the dead swollen and blackened and charred. But as I told you before, it wasn’t so simple as that—things began to prey on him.”

“What things?”

“Oh the state of the country—things like that. And then your grandfather and your mother were great church-goers and he wasn’t that. And you see your mother took a different view of things—people did then—she thought we

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were all right and the Germans evil and in her heart I think she was ashamed of John as a bit of a coward. Well, he weren't that for one moment. Mind you, boy, it's easier to see it now. And . . . and sometimes I wonder to myself how much of it I'm making up because I loved him so."

"You loved him?"

"Oh aye." Porteous turned directly to Halliday. "Don't let me give you the wrong picture. He was a gay man often. A mercurial man. If he'd had a bit better education I think he might have held his own more but many times he found it hard to express properly what was in him. He was easy to bait. A great big man you know. Like yourself. Very gentle. Sometimes when your mother went on at him he'd just stand there bewildered by it all. And yet . . . and yet I don't say as it was all her fault. Not by a long chalk it wasn't. It was the way she'd been brought up. Your father could make me laugh more than anyone I ever knew, when he was in the mood. And the odd thing was, so could your grandfather the Captain, and yet he seemed to have no sense of humour at all on occasion and never where it concerned your father. They both made me laugh but was as different as chalk from cheese. Of course your grandfather was too fond of your mother and looked down on your father as not good enough for her."

"I can imagine that."

"He was very kind to me, your father."

"How?"

"Well, I was younger than him a few years. I had my troubles too at that time. He helped me through them. I often think of those days, Benjamin—he was the best friend I ever had."

The sun itself began to descend from the clouds. The

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two men leaned themselves against the church wall and watched it as it disappeared into the sea beyond Hoy hill. The waves breaking against the rocks immediately beneath them grew calmer. One more question remained to be asked: "But why did he kill himself?"

"How d'you mean?"

Halliday was confused. "I don't know what I mean," he said slowly. "You see, it's been all mixed up for me. I was too young to understand it. I'd got it wrong. I always had some childish idea that he'd deliberately killed himself. Of course mother died when I was seventeen you know—it was grandfather who helped me to qualify. But didn't father kill himself?"

"Good lord no!" said Porteous fiercely. "He never wanted to do that. Oh, sometimes he got low, and he might even have said it if he was drunk or something; but he wasn't that sort. He was drowned, boy—ship went down off Iceland—and a lot of others went too. It wasn't nothing to do with him."

"No."

"How ever could you think that? Did you think he scuttled her?"

"No," said Halliday wonderingly. "No, Mr. Porteous, I don't know how I got the idea or how it's stayed with me so long—it must have been something mother said."

"Well, she was wrong," said Porteous. "Course she said some funny things. And I do believe she wanted him to leave Orkney and give up the sea. He was only a deck-hand you know. And her father had been a Captain. Oh, she loved John, you know."

"She did?"

"Yes. Yes. That's why she fought him so hard. She thought she was fighting for him. T'was the wrong way.

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At least . . . at least that's how it seems to me now." Porteous raised his arm and pointed across to Hoy. "Look at the last of the sun," he said. And they watched together as the red tip disappeared beyond the hill and the dusk dropped in over the sea and the islands.

"You have done me more of a service than you'll ever know, Mr. Porteous," said Halliday. "More than you'll ever know," he repeated in wonder.

◆ 3 ◆

IN Katopos, Berridge was thinner. They walked across the compound in the darkness by the light of the fires from the long ward. "As you see, I've made progress," Berridge said. "I haven't been able to spend all the time on them I'd like, because there's so much else to be done here."

"You should leave that to the others."

Berridge shrugged his shoulders. "That would be an indulgence," he said. They went into Halliday's old rooms, which Berridge and his wife now occupied.

"I find the problem's a bit like a naughty child crying in the night," said Berridge. "You don't know when it's genuinely ill and when you should go and pick it up." Then: "I always knew you'd come back," he said.

"Why?"

"You were constitutionally incapable of doing otherwise."

"I'm not so sure," said Halliday. "I had a piece of luck. And anyway I'm not staying here, I'm going to Manda."

"Ah," said Berridge.

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“I can see things are in good hands here.”

“Thank you. Were you surprised at the warmth of your welcome?”

“Yes. By the way, I made a will today leaving what I have to Aileen Joyce—not that there’s much—but just in case, you know. Will you keep it for me?”

“Of course.”

“I mean I might be back soon—I don’t know what I’ll find in Manda. It’s possible one day she might even come out here. But . . . well, first things first.” Berridge was silent.

“How’s Smith getting on,” asked Halliday to change the subject.

After a moment Berridge giggled: “He’s learning fast,” he said.

And later that night Halliday wrote to Aileen. He had not trusted himself to see her on his way back from Orkney. He thought that now they might have married. They might have married and had the family he longed for. But she could not come to Manda. And it was a question, as he had lamely remarked to Berridge, of what with him came first. He did not think that she would have had it any other way.

He raised his eyes from the paper. He had told her simply what had occurred. He did not know how long he might be in Manda.

In his mind as he wrote this letter were images of Aileen. Of those moments that were his alone and that he alone had seen.

♦ 4 ♦

THREE were no vultures in the sky overhead. The end was not yet. Three men walked slowly through the swamp. Hundreds of birds poised on long legs gazed at them as they passed. Towards the East flew a swarm of parrots. A peacock cried. The swamp had begun to open out. They were skirting round pools. There was war in the pools; and a fermenting. Somehow the men managed to keep to the firmest ground; they rarely sank deeper than their knees. The water was oily here—the insects gleamed that ran and walked on this water. Ants were working in the trees. The sweat had become like an oil on them—in this oil insects had begun to stay and sting continually. But one of the men did not mind this. And presently the insects left him and gathered more abundantly on the other two.

No, one of these men did not mind about the insects. He was remembering. He was thinking that a godless, childless man is bound to have times of depression, but he was not depressed this morning. Nothing had ever strengthened him as his new belief that he was good. He hoped for many years of life; years of peace. Of believing in himself at last. Of believing in himself although he knew within him was a 'lack', was a deficiency of being, that many others did not have—particularly women. There were no vultures above.

On the beach at the edge of the lagoon was a dead crocodile, its flesh rotting and covered in a mass of carrion black flies. The flies swarmed all over the body, coming

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and going beneath the hide, and under the hide the buzzing began to echo but did not today sound like a lament. Abraham and Isaac helped him into the log boat, pushed him out into the current. He was glad to get into the boat. He was tired.

He turned back and waved with the paddle to where they stood in the marsh—knee-deep in the water, the mangroves, the orchids, the lilies, the flies and the mud.

Abraham and Isaac stood motionless till he was out of sight—till he had slid deep into the waterway, the white and gold flowers, the frogs and the snakes.

The insect wings shivered in his ears but did not reproach him—nor did the cries of the marsh birds. Fragments. Fragments of life.

The swamp was quiet. He had passed the monkey moaning like a child. The common rat had dived under the log boat. The crocodile had slid after the rat.

Only one bird cried, cried gently, holding on to the note, trembling it, prolonging it, like a note on a piano. A soft note. Aileen knew all right. She knew where he was going. He was tired tonight. He had come so far. How gracefully she had given him up. Was she married now? Did the child call someone father?

He lay down in the boat beside the medical supplies, he fell into an exhausted sleep. He let the current bear him on towards Manda. Was she thinking of him now? How much had he hurt her?

It was not of the swamp he dreamed, not of Aileen, not of his father, not of Alejo, not of Kamante: the speaker in the dream—a comic one—was Grandfather Hosken, old sea captain, so intolerant of John Halliday his only son-in-law.

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The old man was dressed this evening like a music hall comedian, not in his sea-going clothes, not in that reefer-jacket. The old man was wearing a red nose. "Benjamin," said Grandfather Hosken. "You're almost as old as me now, so I'll tell you what I stood for." The old man was convulsed with laughter. "I insist on having my say," he cried out. "I stood for the reformation of morals, particularly the mayor's. For the original ten commandments and those you read in the Bible. For the union of all, but Ireland—Jew, Hindu, Negro and Gentile." "Did you, Grandfather?" "I did, Ben, I did. I was a good Cornishman. I stood for one green field, for a horse, a cow, and all children of the soil." "Did you stand for the children of the soil, Grandfather?" "I did, Ben, I did. I stood for no censorship, for free pardon for all prisoners, for subsidies from the State, fairs every Friday, and a revival of the music hall." "You're laughing at me, Grandfather." "Somebody must boy, somebody must." The boat moved on. He knew she was helping the boat on.

The log boat was moving a little faster. It trailed some of the white and gold flowers behind it in the water.

"I don't dislike this swamp, Ben." Downstream they went. Into the winding channels. Down towards the lake.

"Good God, Ben, the rushes look to be snakes, the snakes to be rushes. The rushes and snakes are veined and rusted. They're marked with circles and with knots. The lizards are all walking over the carpets of lilies and they're changing colour as they sink. We're enclosed, Ben. Everything but the birds is disguised. The yellow trees are brown and the brown and green are yellow. You need to

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look. But you don't know what to look at next—the sky, the water, or the land."

Yellow clouds blew overhead into the darkness, into Africa.

"The water's moving faster now, boy. It's a lake."

"Diani," said Halliday. "Diani."

"The water tastes bitter and of salt but not like the sea."

Across the lake. Cracked through the dead forest.

"Now there're spiders dropping on us like rain."

"Rain?"

"Rain."

It had rained in England too. Some days all day. Yellow clouds blew overhead into the darkness, into Africa.

"You know, Ben," said the old sailor, taking off his red nose, putting his reefer-jacket on and lying down companionably beside his grandson in the bottom of the log boat. "The best Captain I ever sailed under wasn't what you'd call a gainly man. Short-legged. Broad in the beam. He didn't like the bloody land. Was always longing to be off the place and back to sea. Your great Aunt Ruby was a hard woman but she kept him at it. But we'll keep her out of it for the minute."

"You told me, Grandfather."

"Did I? Well I'll tell you again. All days lead to the grave."

Halliday sat up in the boat. Beneath the yellow clouds silver clouds of cobwebs floated directly above the boat, not cobwebs but fragments of rushes, of bullrushes blown from the marshes by the evening wind. He lay down in the boat. He had not travelled as far or as fast as his grandfather had said. He had not yet reached the lake. He wished the child was in the boat.

"All right?"

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“All right.”

“We should have got you aboard earlier, Ben. You needed a good blow from the South-West wind from what your father said. You were too long on the land, your father said.”

“He said that?”

“He did. We’re friends now, your father and I.”

The silver clouds directly over the log boat, directly over the trailing flowers, hung like some long gauze curtain suspended from the moon.

“Are you coming with me, Ben?”

“No, you’re coming with me, Grandfather.”

Halliday opened his eyes. It was still dark. He turned over on his side. He rested his head on her shoulder.

“I blame myself about your father, Ben. I see it now, Ben. It’s been pointed out.”

Halliday opened his eyes and sat up in the boat. It was still dark. Once again he lay back and began to dream. There was something in the night air that was invoking these dreams.

This time it was his father that was speaking. “I was lying Benjy,” his father was saying, “on a ridge in Flanders’ fields. A sailor you know boy, never good on land, shouldn’t have been there at all, but in the army there I was. There was men behind us—officers and one or two in bowler hats. Yes I knew your mother then, boy. I’d known her as a girl but I wasn’t married to her then. She was right to get angry. It’s pitiful to remember anything so well. I didn’t speak of it often though—what was the point? She didn’t understand such things. These fellows behind us, they were in bowler hats. It was they who’d

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sent off the yellow cloud. A cloud of gas, Benjy: a cloud of poison gas." Yellow clouds moved over his head, moved deeper into Africa.

"The cloud went down in the valley straight towards the German lines. We didn't know if the Germans were still there or not. Nobody had been moving down there. Nobody was moving. Nobody was firing at us. It was as quiet as I've known it at sea in a fog, Ben." As quiet as the swamp. As quiet as the swamp listening to funeral drums. "The cloud went on almost up to their lines: a thick yellow cloud, boy, shaped like a man's fist. A German soldier walks out of the front line of their trenches straight towards the cloud. Nobody fires at him. Not from either side. He was all alone, Ben. He walks towards the cloud. We didn't know if they was still there in those trenches, the Germans, or all gone but him, or under orders to keep silent, or waiting for the wind to change and blow the cloud back on us, or thinking we'd mow 'em down if they broke. Or just hypnotised by that advancing yellow cloud.

"But this soldier, Benjamin, he proceeded deliberately. No fuss about *him* at all. I put my glasses on him. They'd made me a sergeant, you see. Took it away later though." And took him away later, whispered Halliday. Father! Lost at sea in the neighbourhood of Iceland. His father took another drink. "They were good glasses—German glasses—always been the best glasses, no doubt of it. He was an old fellow this soldier, looked to me as if he'd been in other wars, and he stared up behind me as he walked, at the officers and the fellows in the bowler hats, though how he knew exactly where they were I couldn't tell for they were lying flat on the ground. But of course it *was* where the cloud had come from. Yes, I thought to myself, ah, he's

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seen where the cloud come from. He had a very sad expression on his face, this old soldier.

“Well, he walked right into the cloud. We all watched him—all those who had glasses had them on him. All the officers and the fellows in the bowler hats, they all had glasses.

“And I had ‘em, boy. I told your mother so. I told her. I told her. I told her.

“We was all wondering if the soldier could come right through the cloud. He waved to us as he went into it. He waved to me, boy. He waved to me as he went into it . . .”

“What happened to him, Father?”

“God’s mad, boy. He’s gone mad.”

“What happened to him, Father?”

“There’s no-one there, boy, it’s all a joke.”

“What happened to the good soldier, Father?”

“The cloud passed on . . . passed on boy.”

The bell passed; the bell blew on. The funeral drums blew on into Africa. The funeral bells blew out to the cold North seas.

“I met your old friend, Father. He’s living still. He told me he loved you, Father. He set me at rest, Father . . . Set me at peace.”

But Halliday woke. Dawn was coming fast. He sat up in the boat. He splashed his face with water. Then slowly and laboriously he began to urge his log boat through the pink mist.

This time there were no hands to help him up over the high bank.

Where were the crocodiles?

Stiffly he pulled himself up. Himself and the medical

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supplies, the vitamins and the food. He stood on the bank looking down into Manda. He heard a drum: a solitary drum beating the lament. He started to walk. He would fetch the supplies later. But the path into the village had disappeared. He had to struggle through the under-growth as he had through the swamp. He saw how the scarlet flowers had run riot, how the grass and the rushes grew over the huts, how the trodden square had broken, how the rats and birds roosted together on the roof-tops. That the rats and birds did not move at his approach.

He pushed his way through the square. In the distance he heard faintly the funeral chant. He stood still, listening. His watch had begun to rub on his wrist. He took it off to wind it. He stared at his watch, then threw it into the scarlet flowers.

At the far end of the village by the pool he saw five huts in which people still lived. He walked over to Friday's hut. He found an empty water basket. He went to the pool and filled it. When the tiny funeral procession returned and saw him he walked into their pool and doused himself with water.

At the head of the procession—thirty-seven men, women, and children—Friday stood, looking much older. Friday smiled that accustomed smile. "Hello," said Friday. At that moment Halliday loved Friday more than anyone on earth.

Halliday emerged from the pool, carefully, slowly, wearily, gratefully; he picked up the basket of water, carried it over and poured it on Friday's head.

"I am very beautiful and very old," said Friday, grinning into the mirror that Halliday had brought him.

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Friday was dying. The evening sun was pouring a dark blue into the shadows beneath the huts and the trees. Some of the huts were so lined by shadow that they seemed one-sided and soon would topple. The shadows were lengthening. The shadows grew darker. The pool turned black as if it were being dyed.

“You are always looking at yourself in your mirror.”

“It’s very good,” said Friday.

Halliday rose, poured a little water into his loin-cloth apron to water the oak tree shoot he had planted beside the hut. He did not think Friday would live till morning.

“I wonder if it will grow,” he said to Friday.

“Why not?” said Friday. “You’d like it to grow wouldn’t you?”

“I was always planting acorns when I was a boy—we all did.”

“You told me.”

“Did I?”

The sun was sinking fast over the edge of the marsh. There were waves of darkness pouring into the marsh. The waves were mingling in the air. Tonight the marsh was sucking the darkness into it as though anxious night should come to Manda first. Occasionally a bird cried as though it were lonely.

“So when you die,” said Halliday, “where do you go?”

“Back to the Great Spirit. All souls gather together at Gaua’s dwelling.”

“True?” said Halliday.

“True,” said Friday.

“Really true?”

“Really true.”

Rising higher and beyond the marsh the waves of darkness blew over Africa. Friday’s loyal wife pointed her thin

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arm towards the North where a star flew across the sky. "It is a young girl," said Friday's wife. "When a young girl goes into a thunderstorm the lightning strikes her and turns her into a star."

Another Sputnik I expect, thought Halliday.

Now you could see the mist ascending into the darkness. And the silence was broken by slitherings and chirpings and the throb of insect wings. But the lonely birds were sleeping and Kono shambled across the square for his accustomed visit and motioned to Halliday to douse him with water.

"Say our poem in English," muttered Kono. "It sounds different in your tongue."

"Not really," said Halliday.

"Say it."

"The day we die," said Halliday, easing himself against one of the water baskets, watching the stars and the rats climbing over the roof-tops . . .

*"The day we die
Then the wind blows
To cover where we walked
The wind blows dust
Which covers our footsteps
Which covers where we walked.
If the wind did not come
Did not do this
Then it would be
As if we were still alive.
That is why the wind blows
That is why it is the wind that comes
To cover our footsteps
To cover where we walked."*

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“It is different in English,” said Kono.

“Perhaps a little,” said Halliday.

Kono’s head nodded. Kono began to doze.

“She was a good woman,” said Friday. “But you are better here; better now. You are too full of different things. Too many things. Such a woman will have another man now.”

“I don’t think so,” said Halliday. “Not . . . not as we were. I hope she is happy. I am happy.”

“No,” said Friday. “But you are happier than you were.”

Kono had begun to snore. The moving star had fallen or simply disappeared over the horizon. Friday’s wife was looking at her husband.

“You do not want to die,” said Friday.

“No.”

“I do,” said Friday. “That glass I see my face in. You looked at other men as I look at that glass.”

“Yes?”

“Too much.”

“Not still?”

“Still.”

“Even here?”

“Yes. Still.”

The hum of the insects grew louder. Friday’s wife grunted, lay down on the floor.

“There is no need now,” said Friday.

“True.”

“When you looked at others,” said Friday, “you thought of yourself. You hoped to see yourself.”

“Who does not?”

“When you looked at Kamante you thought of yourself.”

“Yes.”

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“Not of *her*,” said Friday and pointed upwards. “I feel with you,” said Friday.

“With me?”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

Friday’s eyes closed. His woolly grey head nodded on to his chest. Kono, Friday, Friday’s wife were all snoring.

“There’s a lot to do,” said Halliday to himself. He picked up one of the empty baskets to go down to the pool to fill it with water. “It’s as difficult as ever to understand,” he said. “To make one’s way through the contradictions.” Purposefully he walked towards the pool. “I’m still changing,” he said. “I insist on it,” he said. He did not think that Friday would be alive in the morning.

Perhaps a year later—to the North—perhaps in the Sahara—there was an explosion. Perhaps caused by the British, or the Dutch, or the Germans, or the Chinese, or the Russians, or the French. Maybe they’ve started another war, thought Halliday when he saw a mushroom cloud blowing towards Manda. It would be odd if we were the only survivors. Halliday was lonely.

There were not many to survive. Friday had gone. And Friday’s wife. Another ten years and he thought there might be an end to this community or a single helicopter could fly the remainder out. It seemed strange to use such a word as ‘helicopter’ in Manda. Perhaps the last of them would never choose to go. It was their choice, not his. His task was to serve, he was sure.

The cloud blew on towards Manda and though by the time it reached Manda, since it was only an experimental explosion, it had turned into a cloud of wind and did not

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harm the marsh birds or the people, again something happened to the scarlet flowers so that as once before they rusted, they blew into the air and their petals swirled and fell like snow—like scarlet snow. The leaves fell on Halliday as he carried a basket of water. And his thoughts swirled like the leaves. One day perhaps he would return to Katopos. Perhaps not. He was prepared for either; and to take things as they came along.

He looked North to where the cloud had come from. He looked upwards to see if some human vehicle was at this very moment circling the sun. He grinned to himself: he had only two eyes to look with—as everyone had had before, and as far as he knew had still. Then he looked behind him to see if there was someone there who might give him a prod and rouse him from his latest smugness—or his present sleep. He was lonely this morning.

The only pattern he was sure of today was a pattern of inconsistencies—that any observation he might make could be equalled by its opposite. That all apparent truths were to be questioned; and once questioned, acted on; and questioned again; and acted on again. Therein lay the thread.

The flowers had ceased lamenting—if lamenting it was. He poured the basket of water over two of the children and began to talk to them.

He was still a young man. He had the feeling there was much to come.

He was talking to the children one morning when he stood up, turned, and listened. Quite distinctly he heard what sounded to be a group of people pushing its way down through the deserted part of the island, pushing its

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way down to the village from the high bank. They came through the grass and the rushes and the scarlet flowers.

The diseased heard the sound and gathered in the square around him, looking. Kono stood at his side.

Across the trodden square, their faces beaming, staggering under the weight of their supplies, came five of the servants who had once lived in Manda. They carried drugs and bandages and food and tools. They walked towards Halliday where he stood surrounded by the survivors. They were young.

The leader stopped in front of Halliday and Kono: "Mr. Berridge told us we could come and help you," he said.

And Halliday, and Kono, cried.

